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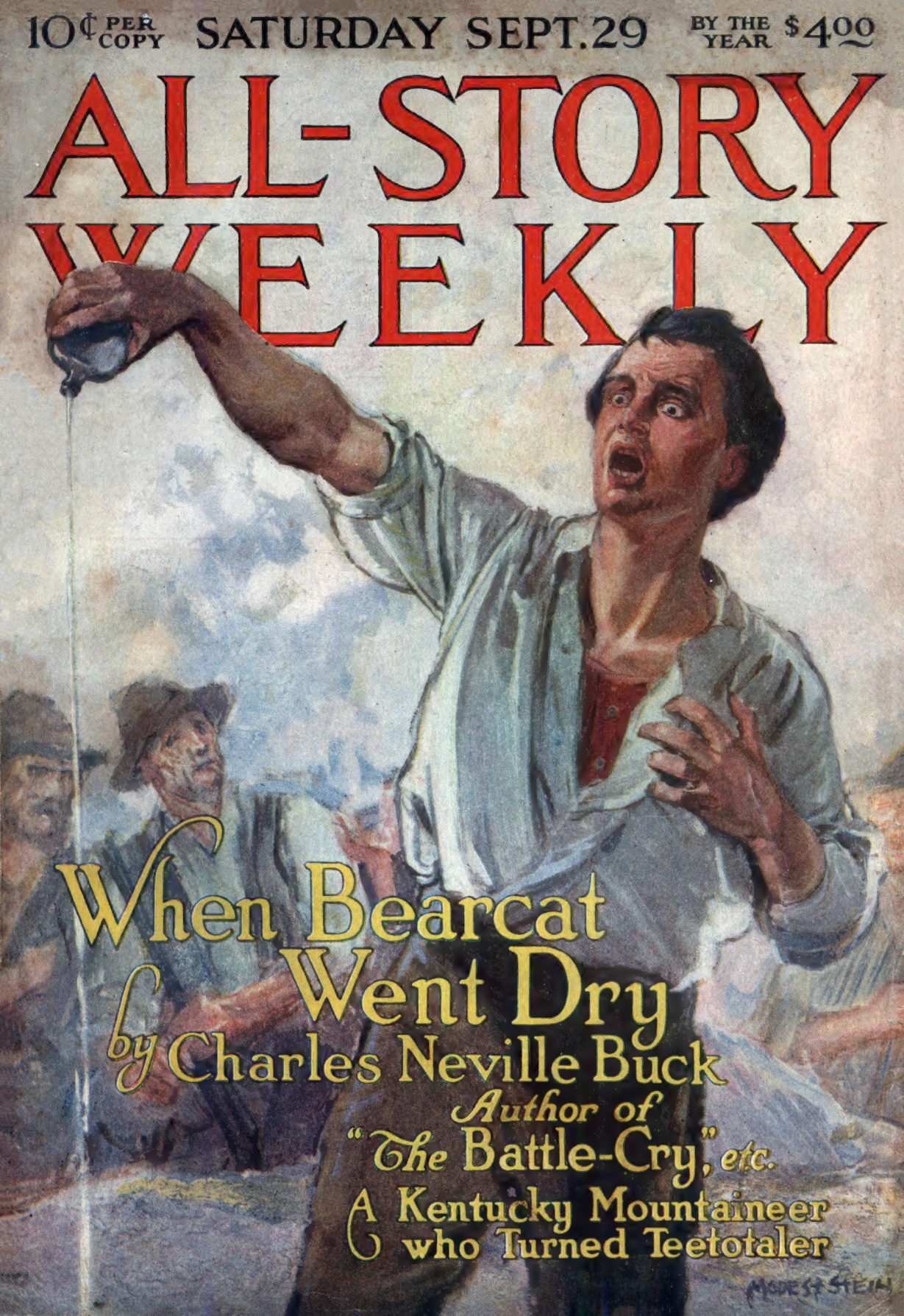
ALL-STORY WEEKLY



When Bearcat Went Dry

by Charles Neville Buck

Author of "The Battle-Cry," etc.

A Kentucky Mountaineer who Turned Teetotaler

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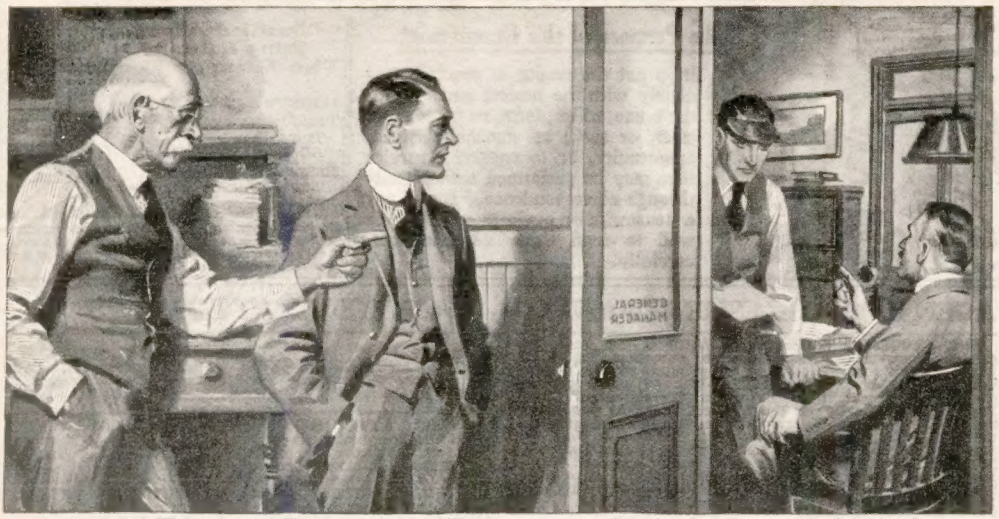

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	Line Rate	
Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 3% cash discount.
THE ARGOSY COMB'N The Argosy / All-Story Weekly	1.50	
Railroad Man's Magazine	1.00	

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SIDE LINE MEN. DO YOU WANT A REAL ONE that one order a day will pay you $9.00? No samples to carry. Something new. Write to-day. Canfield Manufacturing Co., 208 Sigel Street, Chicago, Ill.

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AUTHORS—MANUSCRIPTS

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Munsey's Magazine	$1.50	Combination Line Rate $4.00 Less 3 per cent cash discount
THE ARGOSY COMBINATION The Argosy / All-Story Weekly	1.50	
Railroad Man's Magazine	1.00	

Minimum Space Accepted, Four Lines

CONTRACT DISCOUNTS.—In addition to a 3 per cent discount for cash, we allow an additional discount of 5 per cent on three consecutive insertions and a 10 per cent discount on six consecutive insertions. These discounts to be deducted from the bill for the third and sixth insertions.

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 West Fortieth Street New York

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXVI — NUMBER 1

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THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 8 WEST FORTIETH STREET, NEW YORK, and TEMPLE HOUSE, TEMPLE AVENUE, E. C., LONDON

FRANK A. MUNSEY, President RICHARD H. TITHERINGTON, Secretary CHRISTOPHER H. POPE, Treasurer

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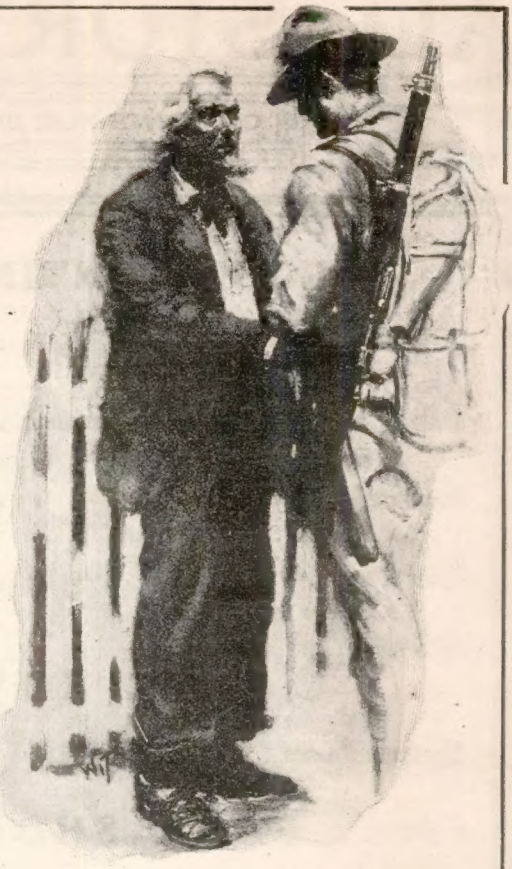
"Good-by, Jim, Take Keer of Yourse'f."



Jim was going off to war—the neighborhood didn't think much of him—but his father knew. And his father guessed the story to come. Yet these were all the words that came. Do you remember James Whitcomb Riley's story-poem? That was in the Civil War. And to-day, again, all over the land, fathers are saying to their sons, "Good-by, Jim, take keer of yourse'f."

Like all masters of literature, his people and his poems and his stories are for all time.

JAMES WHITCOMB RILEY

The great spirit has passed on. "There's another good pal gone over the border." The dearly beloved of all America's children and all America's grown folks who have stayed young, has passed away.

From the little child that wrote, "I feel sort of alone until I read your poems" to President Wilson who says, "I render my tribute of affection and appreciation to him," this nation feels the great loss.

But it turns with even more eagerness to the stories and the poems he left behind him. More eagerly than ever does the small boy read "That Old Swimmin' Hole"—more gladly do the mother and father read "That Old Sweetheart of Mine."

The quiet street in Indianapolis seems deserted and dead. Uncle Sam's mail service no longer has to bend beneath the burden of 10,000 letters going to that quiet house on the 7th of each October. James Whitcomb Riley has passed on, but his work is here for all his lovers.

Perhaps you think you "don't care for poetry"—yet you love James Whitcomb Riley. That's because his stories could only be told in verse—for he had a song in his heart—a song of all mankind.

Unlike all other poets, he dealt with stories of every day—things in all our lives. There is in all his work no bitter word. He is sweetness and light in these days of hatred and terror—a drink of fresh water to the thirsty and weary.

A Poor Boy in Indiana

He was a poor boy in Indiana—too full of life and genius for schooling. He traveled with a circus, he worked on a railroad, on a steamship. He made his living in a thousand ways—until one day—an epoch-making day for this nation—he published a modest little poem in his home paper. Soon the world sat up and took notice—James Whitcomb Riley became as much a household word as Santa Claus.

The world knew his quality years ago. Longfellow, Lowell, and Holmes bowed to his genius. Mark Twain loved his "kindness and sincerity and admired his art." and William Dean Howells wonders "at the passion for the homely things of life," and George Ade says that "Riley is the only one who hobnobs with the LL.D. and the farm hand at the same moment." And now, to-day, President Wilson says, "I render my tribute of affection and appreciation to James Whitcomb Riley."

His Heirs Desire Only a Small Royalty

The heirs of James Whitcomb Riley came to us, as the publishers of Mark Twain, and said that they would be glad to reduce their royalty to a negligible amount, so that we could place the works of the People's Poet in the homes of all those who loved him—so we are able to make the books at a very low price—for the present—a price we can pass on to you. We have planned a fitting form for these books—beautifully made—the easy-to-read, comfortable sort of books that James Whitcomb Riley would have liked.

"He was the poet of hope and cheer—the lover and friend of mankind." He is the only writer whose birthday has been made a state holiday. By the time you read this, Riley Day will be celebrated in Indiana. And Riley Day will be celebrated in your heart and your home if you send this coupon.

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Send the coupon without money for your set on approval to-day.

HARPER & BROTHERS
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Please send me the complete works of **James Whitcomb Riley**, bound in rich cloth, stamped in gold, fully illustrated. I may keep this set for ten days for examination and return it to you, at your expense, if I do not want it. If I keep the books I will remit $1.50 a month for thirteen months.

Name.....

Address.....

10% added to price in Canada because of duty

ALL-STORY WEEKLY

VOL. LXXVI NUMBER 1

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 29, 1917

When Bearcat Went Dry

by Charles Neville Buck

Author of "The Battle-Cry," "The Call of the Cumberlands," "Blue Sky," etc.

CHAPTER I.

BIG MAN OR BIG FOOL?

A CREAKING complaint of loose and rattling boards rose under the mountaineer's brogans as he stepped from the threshold to the porch. His eyes, searching the wooded mountainside, held at first only that penetration which born woodsmen share with the hawk and ferret, but soon they kindled into irascibility as well.

He raised his voice in a loud whoop that went skittering across the rocky creek-bed where Little Slippery crawled along to feed the trickle of Big Slippery ten miles below, and the volume of sound broke into a splintering of echoes against the forested crags of the Old Wilderness Ridges.

"You, Turner!" bellowed the man with such a bull-like roar as might have issued from the chest of a Viking; "you Turner, don't ye hear me a callin' ye?"

A woman, rawboned and crone-like before her time under the merciless forcing of drudgery, appeared in the door wiping reddened hands on a coarse cotton apron.

"I reckon he'll be hyar, presently, paw," she suggested in a high-pitched voice meant to be placating. "I reckon he hain't fared far away."

The hodden-gray figure of the man turned to his wife and his voice, too, dropped now to conversational pitch, held a surprisingly low and drawling cadence.

"What needcessity did he hev ter go away a-tall?" came the sharp interrogation. "He knowed I aimed ter hev him tote thet gryste acrost ther ridge ter the tub-mill, didn't he? He knows that hit's perilous business ter leave corn like that a layin' round, don't he—sprouted corn!"

A flash of poignant anxiety clouded the woman's eyes. Corn sprouted in the grain before grinding! She knew well enough what that meant—incrimination in the eyes of the Government—trial, perhaps, and imprisonment.

"Ye 'lowed a long while since, Lone," she reminded him with a trace of wistfulness in her voice, "thet ye aimed ter quit makin' blockade licker fer all time. Hit don't pleasure me none ter see ye a follerin' hit ergin. Seems like thar's a curse on hit."

"I don't delight none in it neither," he retorted grimly. "But what else is thar

ter do? I reckon we've got ter live somehow—hain't we?" For an instant his eyes flared with an upleaping of rebellion, then he turned again on his heel and roared: "Turner—you Turner!"

"Ther boy seemed kinderly fagged out when he come in. I reckon he aimed ter slip off and rest in ther shade somewhars fer a leetle spell afore ye needed him," volunteered the boy's mother, but the suggestion failed to mollify the mounting impatience of the father.

"Fagged! What's fagged him? I hain't never seen nothin' puny about him. He's survig'rous enough ter go a snortin' an' a stompin' over ther hills like a yearlin' bull a longin' for battle. He's knowed from God's Blessin' Creek to Hell's Holler by ther name of Bearcat Stacy, hain't he? Bearcat Stacy! I'd hate ter take my name from a varmint—but it pleasures him."

"I don't sca'cely b'lieve he seeks no aimless quarrels," argued the mother defensively. "Thar hain't no meanness in him. He's jest like you was, Lone, when ye was twenty a goin' on twenty-one. He's full o' sperit. I reckon Bearcat jest means thet he's quick like an' supple."

"Supple! Hell's torment! Whar's he at now? He's jest about a layin' somewhars on his shoulderblades a readin' thet everlastin' book erbout Abe Lincoln. You Turner!"

Then the figure of a young man appeared swinging along with an effortless stride down the steep grade of the mountain which was richly mottled with the afternoon sun. He came between giant clusters of flowering laurel, along aisles pink with wild roses and white with foamy spray of elder blossoms, flanked by masses of collossal rock. His every movement was a note of frictionless power.

Like his father, Turner Stacy measured a full six feet, but age and the yoke of hardship had not stooped his fine shoulders nor thickened his slenderness of girth. His face was striking in its clear chiseling of feature and its bronzed color. It would have been arrestingly handsome but for its marring shadow of surliness.

In one hand he held a battered book, palpably one used with the constancy and devotion of a monk's breviary, and a forefinger was still thrust between the dog-eared pages.

"Lincoln: Master of Men." Such was the title of the volume.

As Turner Stacy arrived at the house, his father's uncompromisingly stern eyes dwelt on the book and they were brimming with displeasure.

"Didn't ye know I hed work for ye ter do ter-day?"

The boy nodded indifferently.

"I 'lowed ye hed ther power ter shout fer me when ye war ready. I wasn't more'n a whoop an' a holler distant."

The mother, hovering in the shadowed interior of the house, listened silently, and a little anxiously. This friction of unbending temper between her husband and son was a thing to which she could never quite accustom herself.

"Turner," said the elder man slowly, and now he spoke quietly with an effort to curb his irascibility, "I know thet boys oftentimes gits uppety an' brash when they're a growin' inter manhood. They've got thar growth an' they feel thar strength an' they hain't acquired neither sense ner experience enough ter realize how plum teetotally much they don't know yit. But speakin' jedgmatically I hain't never heerd tell of no Stacy afore what hain't been loyal ter his family an' ther head of his house. 'Pears ter me like hit pleasures ye beyond all reason ter set yoreself acrostwise erginst me."

The boy's eyes grew somberly dark as they met those of his father with undeviating steadiness. An analyst would have said that the outward surliness was, after all, only a mask for an inner questioning—the inarticulate stress of a cramped and aspiring spirit.

"I don't know as ye hev any rightful cause fer ter charge me with bein' disloyal," he answered slowly, as if pondering the accusation. "I hain't never aimed ter contrary ye."

Lone Stacy paused for a moment and then the timbre of his voice acquired the barb of an irony more massive than subtle.

"Air yore heart in torment because ye

hain't ther President of ther country, like Abe Lincoln was? Is thet why ye don't delight in nothin' save dilitary dreams?"

A slow, brick-red flush suffused the brown cheeks of Bearcat Stacy, and his answer came with a slowness that was almost halting.

"When Abraham Lincoln was twenty years old he warn't no more president then what I be. Thar hain't many Lincolns, but any feller kin have ther thing in him, though, thet carried Lincoln up ter whar he went. Any feller kin do his best and want ter do some better. Thet's all I'm aimin' after."

The father studied his son's suddenly animated eyes and inquired dryly. "Does this book l'arnin' teach ye ter lay around plum ind'lent with times so slavish hard thet I've been p'intedly compelled ter start ther still workin' ergin, despite my a bein' a Christian an' a law-lover?"

There was in the sober expression of the questioner no cast of hypocrisy or conscious anomaly, and the younger man shook his head.

"I hain't never shirked no labor, neither in ther field ner at ther still—but—" He paused a moment and once more the rebellious light flared in his eyes and he continued with the level steadiness of resolution. "But I hates ter foller thet business, an' when I comes of age I aims ter quit hit."

"Ye aims ter quit hit, does ye?" The old mountaineer forgot in the sudden leaping of wrath at such unfilial utterances, that he himself had a few minutes before spoken in the same tenor. "Ye aims ter defy me, does ye? Waal even afore ye comes of age hit wouldn't hardly hurt ye none ter quit drinkin' hit. Ye're too good ter make blockade licker, but ye hain't none too good ter lay drunk up thar with hit."

This time the boy's flush was one of genuine chagrin and he bit off the instinctive retort that perhaps a realization of this overpowering thirst was the precise thing which made him want to break away from a serfdom which held him always chained to his temptation.

"Ye thinks ye're too much like Abe Lincoln ter make blockade licker," went on the angry parent, "but ye hain't above rampagin' about these hills seekin' trouble an' raisin' up enemies whar I've done spent my days aimin' ter consort peaceable with my neighbors. Hit hain't been but a week since ye broke Rattler Webb's nose."

"Hit war in fair fight," replied the young man defensively; "fist an' skull, an' I only hit him wunst."

"Nobody else didn't feel compelled ter hit him even wunst, did they?"

"Mebby not—but he was seekin' ter bulldoze me an' I'd done laughed hit off twicet."

"An' so ye're a goin' on a layin' up trouble erginst ther future. Hit hain't ther makin' of licker thet's laid a curse on these hills. Hit's drinkin'. Ef a man kin walk abroad nowadays without totin' his rifle-gun an' a dreadin' ther shot from the la'rel, hit's because men like me sought ter bring about peace. I counseled a truce in ther Stacy-Towers war, because I war a Christian an' I didn't 'low thet God favored bloodshed. But ther truce won't hardly last ef ye goes about stirrin' up ructions.

"Bearcat Stacy!" stormed the older man furiously. "What air a bearcat anyways? Hit's a beast thet rouses up from sleep an' crosses a mountain fer ther pure pleasure of tearin' out some other critter's throat an' vitals. Hit's a varmint drove on by ther devil's own sperit of hatefulness.

"Even in ther feud days men warred with clean powder an' lead, but sich-like fightin' don't seem ter satisfy ye. Ye hain't got no use fer a rifle-gun. Ye wants ter tear men apart with yore bare hands an' ter plumb rend 'em asunder! I've trod ther streets of Marlin Town with ye, an' watched yore eyes burnin' like hot embers, until peaceable men drew back from ye an' p'inted ye out ter strangers. 'Thar goes ther Bearcat,' they'd whisper. 'Give him ther whole road!' Even ther town marshal walked in fear of ye an' war a prayin' ter God Almighty ye wouldn't start nothin'."

"I don't never seek no fight." This time Turner Stacy spoke without shame. "I don't never have no trouble, save whar I'm obleeged ter hev hit."

"Thet's what Kinnard Towers always 'lowed," was the dry retort, "though he's

killed numerous men, and folks says he's hired others killed, too."

The boy met the accusing glance and answered quietly:

"Ye don't favor peace no more then what I do."

"I've aimed ter be God-fearin' an' law-abidin'," continued the man whose face and figure might have been cast in bronze as a type of the American pioneer, "yet ye censures me fer makin' untaxed licker!" His voice leaped.

"I've seed times right hyar on this creek when fer ther most part of a whole winter we hunted fer salt an' thar warn't none to be had fer love nor money. Thar warn't no money in these hills nohow—an' damn little love ter brag about. Yore maw an' me an' poverty dwelt hyar tergether—ther three of us. We've got timber an' coal an' no way ter git hit ter market. Thar's jest only one thing we kin turn inter money or store-credit—an' thet's our corn run inter white licker."

He paused for a reply, and when his son volunteered none, he swept on to his peroration:

"When I makes hit now I takes numerous chances, and don't complain. Some revenuer, a settin' on his hunkers, takin' life easy an' a waitin' fer a fist full of blood-money, is liable ter meet up in ther highway with some feller thet's nursin' of a grudge ergin' me or you. Hit's plumb risky an' hits damn hard work, but hit hain't no wrong-doin', an' ef yore grandsires an' yore father hain't been above hit, I reckon you hain't above hit neither."

Turner Stacy was still standing on the porch, with one finger marking the place where he had left off reading his biography of "Lincoln: Master of Men." He looked at his father and his mother, withered to sereness by their unrelenting battle with a life that had all been frost-bite until even their power of resentment for its injustice had guttered out and died into a dull acceptance.

His fingers gripped the book. Abraham Lincoln had, like himself, started life in a log house and among crude people. Probably he, too, had, in those early days, no one who could give an understanding ear to the whispering voices that urged him upward. At first the urge itself must have been blurred of detail and shadowy of object.

Turner's lips parted under an impulse of explanation, and closed again into a more hopelessly sullen line. The older man had chafed too long in heavy harness to comprehend a new vision.

So the picture he made was only that of a headstrong and wilful junior who had listened unmoved to reason, and a slow resentment kindled in the gaze of the bearded moonshiner.

"I've done aimed ter talk reason with ye," came the angry voice, "an' hit don't seem ter convince ye none. Ef ther pattern of life I've sot ye hain't good enough, do ye think ye're better than yore maw, too?"

"I didn't never say ye warn't good enough." The boy found himself freezing under this misconstruction so that his very eagerness to be understood militated against him.

"Waal, I'll tell ye a thing I don't talk a heap about. Hit's a thing thet happened when ye was a young baby. I spent two y'ars in prison then fer makin' white whisky."

"You!" Turner Stacy's eyes dilated with amazement, and the older face hardened with a baleful resentment.

"Hit warn't jest bein' put in ther jail-house. Hit war ther reason. Ye talks mighty brash erbout ther sacredness of ther revenue laws—waal listen ter me afore ye talks any more." He paused and then went on as if forcing himself to an unwelcome recital.

"I've always borne the name hyarabouts of bein' a law-abidin' citizen and a man thet could be trusted. I'd holped ter bring peace to the mountings, but when they lawed me and sent me down to Looeyville fer trial, ther government lawyer 'lowed thet sense I was a prominent citizen up hyar and a breakin' of the law, they had ought to make a sample of me. Because my reputation was good I got two y'ars."

The son took an impulsive step forward, but with an imperious wave of the hand, his father halted him.

"Hold on! I hain't quite done talkin' yit. In them days we war livin' over ther ridge, whar Little Ivy heads up. You thinks this hyar's a pore fashion of dwellin'-house, but thet one hed jest a single room an' na'ry a winder in hits four walls. Yore maw war right ailin' when they tuck me away ter ther big co'te an' she war mighty young, too, an' purty them days afore she broke. Thar warn't no man left ter raise ther crops an' you rared like a young calf ef ye didn't git yore vittles reg'lar.

"I reckon mebby ye hain't hardly got no proper idee how long two y'ars kin string out ter be when a man's sulterin' behind bars with a young wife an' a baby thet's liable ter be starvin' meanwhile! I reckon ye don't hardly realize how I studied down thar in prison about ther snow on these God-forsaken hillsides an' ther wind comin' through ther chinks. But mebby you kin comprehend this hyar fact. You'd hev pintedly starved ter death, ef yore maw hedn't rigged up a new still in place of ther one the government confiscated, an' made white licker all ther time I was down thar. She did thet an' paid off ther interest on ther mortgage an' saved a leetle mite for me when I come home. Now air ye sich a sight better then yore maw was?"

A yellow flood of sunlight fell upon the two figures and threw into a relief of high lights their two faces: one sternly patriarchal and rugged, the other vitally young and spare of feature.

"Whilst I war a layin' thar in jail a tormentin' myself with my doubtin' whether either one of ye would weather them times alive, she was a runnin' ther still hyar in my stead. Many's ther day she tromped over them hills through ther snow an' mud with you a whimperin' on her breast an' wropped in a shawl thet she needed her own self. Many's ther night she tromped back ergin an' went hongry ter bed, so's you could have plenty ter eat, when thar warn't sca'cely enough ter divide betwixt ye. But them things she did in famine days, you're too sanctified ter relish now."

Turner Stacy trembled from head to foot. It seemed to him that he could see that grim picture of retrospect and despite his stoic's training his eyes burned with unshed tears. Loyalty to kith and kin is the corner-stone of every mountain-man's religion; the very grail of his faith. Into his eyes blazed a tawny, tigerish light, but words choked in his throat and his father read, in his agitation, only a defiance which was no part of his thought.

"Now, see hyar," the old man went on with mounting autocracy, "I've done told ye things I don't oftentimes discuss. I've done reasoned with ye an' now I commands ye! Ye hain't of age yit, and until ye be ye've got ter do as I bids ye. A'tter that, ef ye aims to turn yore back on yore family ye can do hit, and I reckon we can go our two ways. That's all I got to say to ye. Now pick up that sack of gryste an' begone with hit."

The boy's face blackened and his muscles tautened under the arrogant domineering of his parent.

"Air ye goin' ter obey me or do I hev ter make ye? Thar's a sayin' thet come acrost ther waters thet no man kin lick his own daddy. I reckon hit still holds good."

Still, the son remained as unmoving as bronze while his eyes sustained unflinchingly the wrathful gaze of a patriarchal order. Then he spoke in a voice carefully schooled to quietness.

"As to thet sayin'," he suggested, "I reckon mebbe hit mought be disproved, but I hain't aimin' to try hit. Ye've done said some right hard things to-day an' some thet wasn't hardly justified; but I aims ter fergit 'em."

Suddenly, by virtue of a leaping light in his eyes, the boy in jeans and hodden-gray stood forth strangely transfigured. Some spirit revelation seemed to have converted him into a mystifying incarnation of latent, if uncomprehended, power. It was as startling as though a roadside beggar had tossed aside a drab cloak and hood of rags and revealed beneath it the glitter of helmet and whole armor.

"I aims ter fergit hit all," he repeated. "But don't seek ter fo'ce me ner ter drive me none, fer thet's a thing I kain't hardly suffer. Es fur as a man kin go outen loyalty I'll go fer you, but I've got ter go in my own fashion, an' of my own free will. Ye've done said thet I went erbout seekin'

trouble an' I hain't got no doubt ye believes what ye says, albeit most of hit's false. Ye says I lays drunk sometimes. Thet's true an' hit's a shameful thing fer a man ter admit, but hit's a thing I've got ter fight out fer myself. Hit don't profit neither of us fer ye ter villify me."

He broke off abruptly, his chest heaving, and to Lone Stacy it seemed that the air was electrically charged, as with the still tensity that goes, windless and breathless, before the bursting of thunder heads among the crags.

Then Bearcat spoke again somewhat gropingly and with inarticulate faultiness, as though a flood pressure were seeking egress through a choked channel. The words were crude, but back of them was a dammed-up meaning like the power of hurricane and forest fire. "Thar's somethin' in me—I don't know how ter name hit—thar's somethin' in me sort of strugglin' an' a drivin' me like a torment! Thet weakness fer licker, I hates hit like all hell, but I hain't all weakness! Thet thing, whatever hit be—sometimes jest w'en hit seems like hit ought ter raise me up—hit crushes me down like the weight of ther mountings themselves."

He wheeled suddenly and was gone.

Lone Stacy turned to his wife and lifted his hands with a gesture of baffled perplexity as he inquired, "Does ye understand ther boy? He's our own blood an' bone, but sometimes I feels like I was talkin' ter a person from a teetotally diff'rent world. Nobody round hyar don't comprehend him. I've even heered hit norated round amongst foolish folks thet he talks with graveyard ha'nts an' he's a witchcraft charm on his life. Air he jest headstrong, maw, or air he so master big thet we kain't comprehend him? No man hain't never called me a coward, but thar's spells when I'm half-way skeered of my own boy."

"Mebby," suggested the woman quietly, "ef ye gentled him a leetle mite he wouldn't contrary ye so much."

Lone Stacy nodded his head and spoke with a grim smile. "Seems like I've got ter be eternally blusterin' at him jest ter remind myself thet I'm ther head of this fam'ly. Ef I didn't fo'ce myself ter git mad, I'd be actin' like he was my daddy instid of me bein' his'n."

CHAPTER II.

DREAMS AND DESIRES.

THE afternoon was half spent and the sun, making its way toward the purpled ridges of the west, was already casting long shadows athwart the valleys. Along a trail which wound itself in many tortuous twists across forested heights and dipped down to lose itself at intervals in the creek-bed of Little Slippery, a mounted traveler rode at a snail-like pace. The horse was a lean brute through whose rusty coat the ribs showed in undernourished prominence, but it went sure-footedly up and down broken stairways of slimy ledges where tiny waterfalls licked at its fetlocks and along the brinks of chasms where the sand shelved with treacherous looseness.

The rider, a man weather-rusted to a drab monotone, slouched in his saddle with an apathetic droop which was almost stupor, permitting his reins to flap loosely. His face, under an unclean bristle of beard, wore a sleepy sneer and his eyes were bloodshot from white whisky.

As he rode, unseeing, through the magnificent beauty of the Cumberlands his glance was sluggish and his face emotionless. But at last the horse halted where a spring came with a crystal gush out of the rhododendron thickets, and then Rattler Webb's stupefaction yielded to a semi-wakefulness of interest. He rubbed a shoddy coat-sleeve across his eyes and straightened his stooped shoulders. The old horse had thrust his nose thirstily into the basin with evident eagerness to drink. Yet, after splashing his muzzle about for a moment he refused refreshment and jerked his head up with a snort of disgust. A leering smile parted the man's lips over his yellow and uneven teeth.

"So ye won't partake of hit, old bag-o'-bones, won't ye?" he inquired ironically. "Ye hain't nobody's brag critter to look at, but I reckon some revenue fellers mought be willin' ter pay a master price fer ye. Ye kin stand at ther mouth of a spring-branch

an' smell a still-house cl'ar up on hits head-waters, kain't ye?"

For a while Webb suffered the tired horse to stand panting in the creek-bed, while his own eyes, lit now with a crafty livening, traveled up the hillside impenetrably masked with verdure, where all was silence. Somewhere up along the water-course was the mash-vat and coil of an illicit distillery, which had contaminated this basin for his mount's brute-fastidiousness. This man, clad in rusty store clothes, was not inspired with a crusading ardor for supporting the law. He lived among men whose community-opinion condones this particular offense and pillories the tale-bearer. But above the matter of local standards and Federal statutes loomed a question of personal hatred, which stimulated his curiosity. He raised one hand and thoughtfully stroked his nose—recently broken with thoroughness and reset with amateurish imperfection.

"Damn thet Bearcat Stacy," he muttered, as he kicked his weary mount into motion. "I reckon I'll hev my chance at him yit. I'm jest a waitin' fer hit."

A half-mile farther on he suddenly drew rein and remained in an attitude of alert listening. Then, slipping quietly to the ground, he hitched his horse in the concealment of a deep gulch and melted out of sight into the thicket.

His place of vantage overlooked a foot-path so little traveled as to be hardly discernible, but shortly a figure came into view around a hulking head of rock, and Rattler Webb's smile broadened to a grin. The figure was tall and spare, and it stooped as it plodded up the ascent under the weight of a heavy sack borne upon its shoulders. The observer did not move or make a sound until the other man had been for several minutes out of sight. He was engaged in reflection.

"So, thet's how the land lays," he ruminated. "Bearcat Stacy's totin' thet gryste over to Bud Jason's tub-mill on Little Ivy, despite ther fact thet thar's numerous bigger mills nigher to his house. Thet sack's full of sprouted corn, and he dastn't turn it in at no reg'lar mill. Them Stacy's air blockadin' up thet spring branch."

He spat at a toad which blinked beadily up at him, and then rising from his cramped posture, he commented: "I hain't plum dead sartain yit, but I aims ter be afore sun-up ter-morrer."

Bearcat Stacy might have crossed the ridge that afternoon by a less devious route than the one he followed. In so doing he would have saved much weariness of leg and ache of burdened shoulder, but Rattler Webb's summing up had been correct, and though honest corn may follow the highways, sprouted grain must go by blinder trails. When he reached the backbone of the heights, he eased the jute sack from his shoulders to the ground and stretched the cramp out of his arms. Sweat dripped from his face and streamed down the brown throat where his coarse shirt stood open. He had carried a dead weight of seventy pounds across a mountain, and must carry back another as heavy.

Now he wiped his forehead with his shirt-sleeve and stood looking away with a sudden dreaminess. A few more steps would take him again into the steamy swelter of woods, where no breath of breeze stirred the still leafage. But here he could sweep with his eyes league upon league of a vast panorama, where sky and peak mingled in a glory of purple haze. Unaccountably the whole beauty of it smote him with a sense of undefined appreciation and grateful wonderment. The cramp of heart was eased, and the groping voices of imagination seemed for the time no longer tortured nightmares of complaint.

There was no one here to censor his fantasies, and out of the gray eyes went their veiling sullenness, and out of the lips their taut grimness.

"Hit's right over thar!" he murmured aloud, but in a voice low pitched and caressing in tone. "I've got ter get enough money ter buy thet farm offen Kennard Towers."

He was looking down upon a point far below him, where through a cleared space flashed the shimmer of flowing water, and where, in a small pocket of acreage, the bottom ground rolled in gracious amenability to the plow and harrow.

Again he nodded, and, since he was quite alone, he laughed aloud.

"She 'lows thet's ther place whar she wants ter live at," he added to himself, "an' I aims ter satisfy her."

So, after all, some of his dreams were tangible!

He realized that he ought to be goin on, yet he lingered, and after a few moments he spoke again, confiding his secrets to the open woods and the arching skies—his only confidants.

"Blossom 'lowed yestiddy she was a goin' over ter Aunt Jane Colby's this mornin. 'Pears like she ought to be passin' back by hyar about this time."

Cupping his hands at his lips, he sent out a long whoop, but before he did that he took the precaution of concealing his sack of sprouted grain under a ledge. Then he bent, listening for an answer—but without reward, and disappointment mantled in his gray eyes as he dropped to the age-corroded rock and sat with his hands clasped about his updrawn knees.

It was very still there, except for the industrious hammering of a "pecker-wood" on a decayed tree-trunk, and the young mountaineer sat almost as motionless as his pedestal.

Then, without warning, a lilting peal of laughter sounded at his back, and Turner came to his feet. As he wheeled, he saw Blossom Fulkerson standing there above him, and her eyes were dancing with the mischievous delight of having stalked him undiscovered.

"It's a right happy thing fer you, Turner Stacy, that I didn't aim to kill ye," she informed him with mock solemnity. "I've heard ye brag thet no feller hereabouts could slip up on ye in the woods, unbeknownst."

"I wasn't studyin' erbout nobody slippin' up on me, Blossom," he answered calmly. "I hain't got no cause ter be a hidin' out from nobody."

She was standing with the waxen green of the laurel breaking into pink flower-foam at her back and through the oak and poplar branches showed scraps of blue sky—the blue of June.

A catch came into Turner's voice, and he said somewhat huskily: "When they christened ye Blossom they didn't misname ye none."

Blossom, he thought, was like a wild rose growing among sun-flowers. When the evening star came up luminous and dewy fresh over the darkening peaks, while twilight still lingered at the edges of the world, he always thought of her.

But the charm was not all in his own eye: not all the magic of first love. The mountain preacher's daughter had escaped those slovenly habits of backwoods life that inevitably coarsen.

Now she stood holding with one hand to the gnarled branch of a dogwood sapling. A blue sunbonnet falling back from her head left the abundance of her hair bared to the light so that it shimmered between brown and gold.

She was perhaps sixteen, and of a willowy slimness which united delicacy and strength.

Her eyes, heavily lashed, were brownish amber and just now full of a mirthful sparkle.

"Ye seemed ter be studyin' about somethin' almighty hard," she insisted teasingly. "I thought for a minute that mebbe ye had growed thar."

Turner Stacey smiled again as he looked at her. In his eyes was unveiled an honest worship.

"I was a studyin' about you, Blossom. I don't know no way ter do that save almighty hard. Didn't ye hear me whoop?"

The girl's head nodded.

"Why didn't ye answer me?"

"I aimed ter slip up on ye, if I could, Turner, but I didn't 'low it would be so plum easy. You made me believe that yore ears could hear the grass a growin'."

The youth took a sudden step toward her and stood close—so close that her breath touched his face fragrantly as she looked up with a witching mockery in her eyes. His heart fluttered with the clamor of impulse to seize her in his arms, but his half-lifted hands dropped to his sides.

He was not quite twenty-one, and she was only sixteen, and the code of the mountains is strict with the simplicity of the pioneer. A woman gives her lips in be-

trothal or, giving them lightly, drops to the caste of a light woman.

So he drew back with a resolute jerk of his head.

"I was a studyin' erbout some day, Blossom," he said, "when thar's a goin' ter be a dwellin'-house down thar. Not a house of warped timbers whar ther hawgs scratch their backs under the floors—but a real house. Mebby by thet day an' time thar'll be a highway men kin travel without torment." He paused, at a loss for power of architectural enlargement, and the girl sighed.

"Then I reckon ye don't hardly 'low ter raise thet house in my lifetime, Turner," she teased. "I'll most likely be too old ter visit ye thar afore a highway gits built."

But he shook his head. "I aims ter speed up ther time of sich things," he announced with the splendid effrontery of youth. "Hit hain't been so long since ther fust wagon came acrost Cedar Mountain. We're liable to see balloons comin' afore we die."

"Aunt Jane Colby was tellin' me about that first wagon to-day at dinner," Blossom assented. "She says one old man asked folks whether it was true or whether he was fitified. He said: 'What manner of contrivance air thet? Hit's got four wheels an' one pair's bigger then t'other pair, an' two of 'em goes round faster then t'other two, an' the Lord A'mighty only knows how hit manages ter keep up with hitself.'"

They both laughed with young condescension for the old-fashioned, and then Turner went on, haltingly by reason of callow diffidence.

"Ef thet house couldn't be reared in time fer you ter come to hit, Blossom—hit wouldn't be no manner of use ter me at all."

"Does ye aim ter make me a present of a house?" she challenged and again the provocative allurement of her swept him so that the smooth sinews of his arms tightened as if with physical effort.

"I means thet some day—when I've done something worth doin', an' when ye're a leetle bit older yoreself, Blossom, you're a goin' ter marry me, an' we're goin' ter dwell thar—together."

The girl's cheeks reddened furiously, and for a moment she made no response, then she declared with a stout self-assertion designed to mask her confusion, "I reckon I'll hev somethin' ter say about thet."

"Ye'll hev everything ter say about hit, Blossom; but"—there was a purposeful ring in his voice that hinted at ultimate victory—"but some day I aims ter persuade ye ter say, 'yes.'"

Her cheeks were brightly pink, and she pretended to be engrossed in the demeanor of a squirrel that quarreled at them from a near-by poplar. Turner Stacy dropped his voice until it was very soft.

"I kin bide my time an' wait twell ye're ready, Blossom; but ef ye don't never say hit, I don't hardly see how I kin go on livin'."

"I'm right glad ef ye likes me, Turner," she demurely assured him. "We've growed up together, an' ef ye was to go away somewhar's an' leave me, I reckon I'd nigh die of lonesomeness."

Distrust of effusiveness was bred in his bone. Laconic utterance was his heritage, and now that his heart demanded expression, and his eyes kindled with the dreamer's fire, he stood struggling against the fettering of his tongue. Then abruptly, tumultuously he burst out, talking fast:

"I hain't got ther gift of speech, Blossom; I only knows thet hit hain't enough ter jest have ye miss me ef I went away. I knows thet when ye stands thar with ther sun on yore hair hit would be spring-time fer me, even ef thar war snow on ther hillsides an' ice in ther creek. I knows thet I'm standin' hyar on solid rock. Yore paw says these hyar hills were old when ther Alps hadn't riz up yit outen ther waters; but when I looks at ye, Blossom, this mountain's shakin' under me—an' yore face is ther only thing thet's steady afore my eyes."

He broke off with something like a choke in his throat, and Blossom was trembling a little under that first wave of new emotion that comes with the waking of the senses. Then she remembered the stories of his escapades and her eyes clouded. Her hand fell flutteringly on his arm.

"If—if ye cares thet much about me,

Turner, I wish—I don't aim ter nag ye—but I wish ye'd promise me thet ye won't give men cause ter say ye drinks too much."

Turner's brow contracted and his lips stiffened. The defensive mask which seemed sullen because it was his idea of impassiveness set itself again, but he nodded.

"Thet's a fair thing," he said slowly. "Drinkin' hain't hardly a thing a gal kin understand noways. I hain't jest a common drunkard, Blossom. Thar's times though when I feels es ef I war a livin' in a jail house—an' seekin' ter git free. Thar's su'thin' in me—I don't know jest what—thet's always fightin'. These hyar hills with their ign'rance an' their dirt an' their poverty seems ter be on top of me 'stid of underneath me. Thet's when I drinks too much. Fer a little spell I seems ter dream I'm free."

A few minutes later the girl started down the "yon" side of the wooded slope, going with a light step and humming a ballad that had come across the sea with the beginnings of America, and the boy looked after her with a passionate tenderness that was far from stoical.

If most of his dreams were intangible and misty, this, his greatest and brightest dream, was at least clear and vivid.

When he could no longer see the flash of her blue dress between the interlacing branches he turned, and drawing his sack of sprouted corn out of its hiding-place, hefted it to his shoulders.

CHAPTER III.

BEARCAT SHOWS HIS TEETH.

OLD man Bud Jason stood at the door of his tub-mill, leaning on the long hickory staff which he always carried. He stood gauntly tall even now that his once broad shoulders sagged and his mane of hair was white, and from his lips came a querulous mumbling, as though he were awaiting some one tardy of arrival. He gave a grunt of relief when the thicket far above him stirred and the figure of Bearcat Stacy appeared, bending under his load of grist.

He turned into the shack and drew out a sack of meal from the bottom of a pile, and as he finished this task a shadow fell across the door. Turner Stacy let his burden fall, and availed himself of the opportunity to drop into a sitting posture on the step of the shanty, resting his back against a post. His broad chest heaved, and a profound sigh of relief broke from his panting lips. The old miller stood regarding him for a little while without words, then broke into volcanic utterance:

"Hell's banjer! May God Almighty holp a country whar a young pa'r of shoulders like yourn don't find no worthier use than man-powerin' good corn acrost ther ridges ter turn hit inter bad licker."

Turner Stacy glanced up in mild surprise for the sentiment.

"I hain't nuver heered ye cavil with a man's license ter use his own corn as he sees fit afore, Bud," was his casual reply, and the white-bearded one wagged his head and laughed tremulously after the fashion of the old.

"I reckon ye don't mistrust me none, Bearcat, even if I does hit now; but here of late I've cogitated a heap whilst I've been a settin' hyar listenin' ter ther creak of that old mill. Seems almost like ther wheel was a lamentin' over hits job. Thar bein' sich a sight of wickedness in ther community whar my grandchildren hes got ter be reared up is a powerful solemn thing fer me ter study over; an' I've jest erbout concluded thet whilst thar's whisky-makin' hyar, ther killin's an' gin'ral wickedness won't hardly diminish none."

Furrows of dubious thought etched themselves on the young man's forehead.

"Ef ye feels thet-a-way, Bud, why does ye consent ter grind corn fer licker?" he demanded; and the reply was prompt:

"I don't grind hit only fer a few men thet I'm beholden to." Pausing a moment, he became more specific. "Yore paw stood over my body wunst when I'd done been shot outen my saddle, an' fought off numerous enemies single-handed, thereby savin' me from death in ther creek-bed. I couldn't hardly deny *him* ther use of my mill even ef his corn *hes* got sprouts in ther grain two inches long—now, could I?"

The boy looked abstractedly away, then suddenly blurted out: "I disgusts blockadin', too, Bud; but pap 'lows hit's ther only way ter mek a livin' hyarabouts."

"Lots of folks argues hit out in like fashion, but I don't hold with 'em." The speaker rapped the boards with his long staff and spoke with conviction: "What these mountings needs air a mite of l'arnin' an' a leetle common sense an' a heap of good roads. Ef prosperity ever comes ter these hills, sonny, hit 'll come along a highway—an' so long as stills don't thrive none along highways, hit looks mightily like a pore chance." After a thoughtful pause he added: "Hit won't never change so long es hits only furriners thet aims ter alter hit. Revenuers kain't do nothin'. Damn thar skunk hides, anyhow! They're our mortal enemies." The old man drew himself up as if he were seeing a vision, and his eyes held an almost fanatical gleam. "But mark down my words! Some day thar'll rise up a mountain man—a man thet hain't never met up with fear, an' thet's as steadfast as ther hills he sprung from. *Thet* man will change hit all, like ther sun changes fog. I wisht I mout live ter see thet day."

"Hit'll tek a powerful towerin' man ter bring sich things ter pass," mused the youth, and the oracle declared vehemently:

"Hit teks a powerful towerin' man ter lead any fight ter victory, whether hit's a guidin' ther Children of Israel outen thar bondage or our benighted children outen thar's."

The miller looked up with the eagerness of a sudden thought. He laid a trembling hand on the boy's arm and demanded in a hushed voice: "Why shouldn't hit be you, Bearcat? Folks says ye bears a charmed life; thet thar hain't enough lead in ther mountings to kill ye. I heerd Kinnard Towers say thet hit war a God's blessin' ther feud ended afore ye got yore growth—an' Kinnard don't fear many. When a man, thet's hardly nothin' but a saplin' of a boy bears a repute like thet—hit must denote thet thar's power in him beyond ther common!"

The boy stood silent for a moment and slowly his brow drew into a black scowl.

"I reckon, Bud, one reason air this," he said bitterly, "thet I'm accounted ter be a drunkard my own self, an' like as not one sich reason es thet air plenty."

Bearcat Turner glanced up to the bristling ridge which he must climb. Already the west was kindling into a flare of richness and the skyline hills were dyed with ashy purple.

"I've done overtarried," he said abruptly, as he lifted his sack from the floor, but his face wore a glow which was not altogether from the sinking sun. "I reckon I'd better be on my way — but I've hed thoughts like your'n myself, Bud."

But Bearcat Stacy had not gone far when that sense of intensified woodcraft which Blossom had derided caused him to halt dead in his tracks.

The sound that had first arrested him had been nothing more than a laugh but, in it, he had recognized a quality that bespoke derisive hostility and a thickness that indicated drink.

He had left the place empty except for Old Bud Jason and no man could have reached it, unannounced by normal sounds, so soon unless the approach had been achieved by stealth.

Bearcat Stacy put down his sack and worked his way back, holding the concealment of rock and laurel; guarding each footfall against the betrayal of a broken twig—and, as yet, denied a view of the tub-mill. But his ears were open and doing duty for his eyes.

"Wall," came the miller's voice in a wrathful tremolo, "what business brings ye hyar as ef ye war aimin' ter lay-way somebody? Folks gin'rally comes hither upstandin'—an' open."

This time the voice of the new arrival was sneeringly truculent:

"Does they come thet-a-way when they fotches in sprouted corn thet they dastn't take elsewhere?"

Bearcat Stacy stiffened as he recognized the voice of Rattler Webb, whom he had not met since their encounter in which a nose had been broken. He knew that in the breast of this man, hitherto unchallenged as neighborhood bully, an ugly and dangerous grudge was festering.

Now it seemed that the old miller, because of friendship for Stacy was to be heckled, and Bearcat's wrath boiled. He heard Bud Jason inquiring in tones no longer querulous but firmly indignant:

"Is thet all ye come fer? Ter blackguard me?"

Rattler answered in a voice savoring more of highwayman's coercion than request.

"I was jest a funnin' with ye, Old Bud, but I'd be mighty obleeged ter ye fer a leetle dram of licker. My bottle's nigh empty an' I've got a far way ter travel yit."

Turner Stacy had now arrived at a point from which he could see around the hulking shoulder of sandstone and the picture which met his eye was not reassuring.

The miller stood barring the door to his shack and the visitor, inflamed of eye, a little unsteady on his feet, confronted him with a swagger of lawless daredeviltry.

"I hain't got no licker. I don't never use hit," replied Jason curtly. "So ef thet's all thet brought ye hyar, ye've already got yore answer an' ye mout es well be farin' on."

Webb's leer darkened to malignity and his voice came in a snarl:

"Ye hain't hardly got no tolerance fer drinkin' has ye, Bud? Albeit ye hain't none too sanctified ter grind up all ther sprouted corn thet other fellers fotches in ter ye."

The miller was alone and unarmed save for his hickory staff, but he was vested with that authority which stiffens a man, standing on his own threshold and facing an insolent trespasser. His manner was choleric and crisp in its note of command.

"I don't aim ter waste no time cavillin' with a drunken carouser. I bids ye ter leave my place. Begone!"

But the traveler, inflamed with the venom of the drunken bully, lurched forward, whipping a revolver from his sagging pocket. With an oath he rammed the muzzle close against the pit of the old man's stomach.

Bud's level eyes did not falter. He gripped his useless hickory as if it had been a lictor's staff of unchallengeable office. Perhaps that steady movement saved his life, for before his assailant's flood of obscene vilification had reached its period, Rattler Webb leaped back—interrupted. Then changed front, wheeling to protect his back against the logs of the rude wall and thrusting his pistol before him, while his jaw sagged abruptly in dismay.

Bearcat Stacy stood facing him, ten yards distant and his right hand was thrust into his opened shirt, under the armpit, where the mountainman carries his holster.

"Air ye follerin' revenuin' these days, Rattler?" inquired Stacy in a voice of such velvet softness that the other responded only with an incoherent snarl. "Because ef ye air, numerous folks hyarabouts will be right glad ter find out who it is that's informin' on 'em."

"Damn ye! Keep thet hand whar hits at!" ordered the aggressor violently, and like the cornered rat he had become doubly dangerous. He had set out only to torture a defenseless victim, and now it seemed a question of killing or being killed.

"Ef ye seeks ter draw hit out or come a step frontwards, so help me Almighty God I'll kill ye in yore tracks!"

Turner Stacy smiled. Upon his ability to do so with a semblance of quiet contempt he was staking everything.

"Shoot whenever ye gits ready, Rattler," he challenged. "But don't do hit onless ye're expectin' ter die, too. When this trigger-work commences, I aims ter get ye."

"Move a hand or a foot then, an' see—" The voice was desperately high pitched and nasal now, almost falsetto, but through its threat Bearcat recognized an undercurrent of sudden terror. The desperado remembered that his horse stood hitched a quarter of a mile away. His right boot sole had been freshly patched and left a clearly identifying mark in the mud. He had prepared no alibi in advance, and within a few hours after Turner fell scores of his kinsmen would be baying on the trail.

"Shoot!" taunted Bearcat Stacy. "Why don't ye shoot?"—and then with an effrontery which dazed his antagonist, he deliberately moved several steps forward—halting nearer the pistol's muzzle.

"I don't aim ter kill ye onless I has ter,"

stormed Webb with weakening assurance. "Halt! I'm givin' ye fair warnin'. Hit's self defense if ye crowds me."

Stacy spoke again, standing once more motionless.

"Ye couldn't shoot thet pistol at me ef I walked in on ye with my hands over my head. My time hain't come yit ter die, because ther's things I was born ter do—an' God Almighty aims ter hev me live till I've done 'em. He don't aim ter hev me hurt by no coward like you, I reckon.

"Ye couldn't shoot any man noways whilst his eyes was lookin' at ye full. Ye has need ter lay hid in ther la'rel afore ye kin pull yore trigger-finger. I dares ye to shoot!"

The white-bearded miller stood motionless, too, measuring all the chances. For a moment he wondered whether it would be possible to strike up the armed hand with his long staff, but he wisely repressed the impulse. This, after all, was a new sort of combat: a duel of wills rather than of weapons. He knew that Bearcat Stacy was unarmed, because he had so recently seen the sweat-drenched shirt clinging close to the arched chest.

Rattler Webb's hand no longer trembled with the uncertainty of tipsiness. His eyes were no longer obfuscated and muddled with whisky fumes. He had reverted to the feral instincts of desperation, and was suddenly sobered. He gripped his outthrust pistol in both hands for greater surety and stood half-crouched with knees bent under him, ready to spring or brace himself against attack. His eyes, gleaming with blood-passion, traveled shiftily so that he could keep watch on both his possible adversaries.

For a moment more the tableau held in silence. Both the miller and the boy could hear the labored, almost gasping breath of the man with the pistol and both knew that the mean temper of his heart's metal was weakening.

Then when a squirrel barked from the timber Rattler Webb started violently, and above the stubble of dirty beard sweat-drops began to ooze on his face.

Why didn't Bearcat Stacy say something. Why didn't somebody move? If he fired now he must kill both men or leave a witness to blab deadly information close on the heels of his flight! In his heart welled a rising tide of panic.

Turner knew by instinct that every moment he could hold Rattler there with his pistol leveled was for the desperado a moment of weakening resolve and nerve-breaking suspense. But he also knew another thing. When the strain of that waiting snapped Rattler would either run or shoot. Mountain annals hold more instances of the latter than the former result. That was the chance to be taken.

Webb carried a notched gun. He had forced many fights in his day, but in all of them there had been the swift tonic of action and little time to think. Now he dared not lower his weapon in surrender, and he was afraid to fire. He felt that his lips were growing dry and thickening. He thrust out his tongue to lick them, and its red tip gave to his ugly features a strange grotesqueness.

Under the brown of wind and sun and the red of liquor-flush his face paled perceptibly. Then it grew greenish-yellow with a sick clamminess of dread.

At last, with a discernible quaver in his voice, he broke the unendurable silence, and his words came brokenly and disjointed:

"I didn't aim ter force no quarrel on ye, Bearcat. Ef ye plum compels me ter do hit, I've got ter kill ye, but I hain't a hankerin' none fer ther task."

"Thet's a lie, too. Ye come hyar a seekin' of evidence because ye're harborin' a grudge erginst me an' ye dastn't satisfy hit no other way."

There was a pause, then Webb said slowly and with a half-heartedness from which all the effrontery had ebbed:

"I 'lows ter go on erbout my business now, but if either one of ye moves from whar ye're standin' twell I'm outen gunshot-range I aims ter kill ye both."

Shifting his revolver to his right hand and feeling behind him with his left, he began backing away, still covering his retreat and edging a step at a time toward the corner of the shack, but at the second step, with a swiftness which vindicated his name, the Bearcat sprang.

The old miller shook his head, but made no outcry. He heard the thud of two bodies and the grunt driven from a chest by the impact of charging shoulders. He saw two figures go down together while a tongue of flame and a muffled roar broke belatedly from the mouth of the pistol.

Whether the bullet had taken effect, or, if so, who was its victim, he could not at first tell. Two human beings, muscled like razor-backs, were writhing and twisting in a smother of dust, their limbs clinched and their voices mingled in snarling and incoherent savagery. The mountain ethics of "fist and skull" impose no Queensbury restrictions. Tooth and knee, heel and knuckle may do their best—and worst.

But the pistol itself flew clear and the old miller picked it up, turning again to observe the result of the encounter.

The fighters had struggled up again to their feet and were locked in a bone-breaking embrace of hatred. For the moment the advantage seemed to rest with Webb, who was clutching Turner's head in the distressing chancery of his powerful right arm and doing his utmost to break the neck. Bearcat's breathing was a hoarse and strangling agony, but his fists battered like flails against the ribs and kidneys of his antagonist. As they swayed and tottered their brogans were plowing up the hard soil and, totally blinded by sweat and rage, they wavered perilously close to the edge of the huge rock, with its ten-foot drop to the mill race.

Even as old Bud gave his warning cry, they went down together, and fell short of the brink, escaping that danger. Stacy writhed free from the neck-grip and both came up again leaping into a fresh embrace of panthers, with eyes glaring insanely out of blood-smeared faces.

Then it all ended abruptly. Bearcat wrenched himself free and sent a chance blow, but one behind which went all his weight and passion, to the other's mouth. The smitten head went back with a jerk. Webb reeled groggily for an instant then crumpled, but before he had quite fallen Stacy, with an insensate fury, was dragging him to his feet and clutching at the throat which his fingers ached to strangle.

At that instant the old miller seized his arms.

"Hold on thar, Bearcat," he cried with his quavering voice. "Stop hit! He's licked now. You'll kill him ef ye hain't heedful."

"I aims ter kill him," panted the boy, casting off the interference of aged arms with the savagery of a dog whose fangs have been pried too soon from the throat of another.

But Bud Jason clung on, reiterating: "Fer shame, son! Thet hain't yore manner of conduct. Fer shame!"

Unsteadily, then, with a slow dawning of reason, Bearcat Stacy staggered back and leaned heavily against the wall of the tub-mill, breathing in soblike gasps. His shirt was half-torn from his body and for the first time the miller saw the ugly gash where a pistol bullet had bitten its grazing course along his left shoulder. Grime and blood stained him and for a while he stood gazing down on the collapsed figure at his feet; a figure that stirred gropingly.

"I reckon," he said slowly, "I'd jest about hev finished him ef hit hadn't a been fer you, Bud. I'm beholden ter ye. I reckon I was seein' red."

Together they lifted Rattler Webb and gave him water from the gourd that hung by the door. When he was able to stand, dourly resentful, baleful of eye but mute as to tongue, Bearcat spoke briefly with the victor's authority.

"I aims ter keep thet pistol o' yourn fer a spell, Rattler. I don't hardly trust ye with hit jest yit. When ye wants hit, come by my house and ask fer hit."

The bully turned sullenly away. He spoke no word of farewell, and offered no protest; but when he was out of sight the miller shook his head, and his voice was troubled.

"Of course ye knows, son, thet he hain't never a goin' ter fergit hit? So long es ther two of ye lives, ye've got ter keep on watchin' him."

Turner nodded. He was bathing his shoulder and spreading cobwebs on its grazed wound.

"I've done wasted a heap of time," he said irrelevantly. "An' hits comin' on to

rain, too. I reckon I'll be benighted afore I gits ter ther 'still."

As he was starting away he paused and turned back for a moment.

"Hit won't profit us none to talk ter folks erbout this matter," he suggested. "I've got enough name already fer gittin' into ructions. Paw don't like hit none."

Gazing after the retreating figure, the old man wagged his head, and his expression was one of foreboding.

"Meanness an' grudge-nursin' kin bring on a heap of pestilence," he mused. "This Rattler will nurse his on ther bottle, an' he won't never wean hit—an' some day—but it don't profit a feller ter borry trouble. These hills hes got enough misfortunes withouten thet."

Already twilight was settling over the valleys, and the ridges were starkly grim as their color died to the neutrality of night and the murk of a gathering storm.

CHAPTER IV.

THE TEMPTATION OF BEARCAT.

WITH a mutter of distant thunder in his ears, the young mountaineer plodded slavishly on under his load. The path twisted among heaped up boulders, where a misstep might mean broken bones, and crawled through entanglements of fallen timber. It wormed into dew-drenched thicknesses where branches lashed the burden-bearer's face with the sting of whips, and soon the colossal barriers began to echo with the storm roar. The clouds were ripped with blue-white blades of lightning. The rock walls of the ranges seemed quaking under the thunder's incessant cannonading and the wind's shrieking mania. Then through the rent and buffeted timber-tops the rain burst in a lashing curtain of water.

Bearcat Stacy, wet to the skin, with the steaming sweat of toil and fight turned into a marrow-pinching chill, cast about him for a place where he could protect his sack of meal until an abatement should come to the storm's violence.

As he sat under a dripping roof of shelving rock to which he had groped his way by the beacon of the lightning, a startled owl swept past him, almost brushing his face with its downy wings.

His wet clothes clung to his flesh with what seemed icy coldness. His shoulder throbbed with an abomination of pain, and his bones ached with a dull wretchedness.

But after a time the wind and thunder dropped away to whimpering echoes. It was as if the hound pack of the furies had been whistled in—its hunt ended.

Turner rose and stamped his numbed feet. There was yet a long way to go before he reached the low-built shed, thatched with brush and screened behind a fallen hemlock-top, where the Stacy still lay hidden.

At last he was there, with every muscle proclaiming its location by the outcry of sore tissues, and ahead of him lay the task of watching and feeding the fire under the mash kettle until dawn.

"Ye kin lay down when ye're ready, Lee," he said shortly to the stockily built man whom he was relieving from duty there. "I'll keep ther fire goin' an' call ye round about dawn."

Taking up the rifle to which he had fallen heir as picket, he made his way from the sentinel's shelter to the still-house itself, stooping low, so that the waning fire might not throw his figure or face into relief. He piled a handful of wood under the kettle and crawled back into the timber.

The heavens were full of stars now; not the small light-points of skies arching over lowlands, but the gorgeous, great stars of the walled highlands.

His mother had done this sort of work to keep him alive while his father was in prison! If he went on doing it, and if Blossom married him, they faced a future of the same drab decay! At the thought of that prospect he ground his chattering teeth and cursed under his breath.

The dull glow of the fire on a tin bucket and cup held his eyes with a spell of fascination. It was white liquor, raw, sweetish, and freshly brewed. A gleam of craving flashed into his eyes: a craving that had come down through generations of grandsires—even though his own father had escaped it. Turner put out one hand.

Here was warmth! Here was to be had for the taking a glow about the heart and a quickened current in the veins. Here was the stuff from which ease and waking dreams would come; release from his aching chill and dulness of spirit!

Bearcat's eyes burned thirstily. He seemed only a vessel of flesh overflowing with craving—with a torture of craving, an utter hell of craving! Then he drew back the eagerly extended hand.

"No," he said grimly. "Blossom air right. Ther stuff 'll ruin me."

Resolutely he turned his back and stood facing the woods, listening to the drip of drenched leafage. Through raw hours he struggled with his appetite. Each time that he went back to throw fresh faggots on the fire he moved warily around the bucket, seeking to keep his eyes averted, but each time his gaze came back to it, and rested there thirstily.

Twice as his watch drew near its end he dipped the cup into the pail only to spill back the contents again, almost wildly watching the thin trickle and greedily sniffing its sweetish invitation. Once the rim met his lips and the taste touched his tongue, but he violently spat it out and wiped his lips on the sleeve of his shirt.

"Hit's ther devil's holy water," he murmured to himself. "Thet's what Brother Fulkerson says—an' I reckon he's right."

The evening star always reminded him of Blossom. He thought of it as her star, and upon it, as upon her own face, he kept his eyes fixed for encouragement as his spirit's resistance waned in the mounting tide of exhaustion. But when even that beacon was gone behind the mountain top he felt the despair of one whose last ally has abandoned him to face travail unsupported.

He fell back on his dreams; dreams of what Lincoln had faced and conquered; of what he, too, might achieve. But now he could see them only dispiritedly as hollow shapes; misty things without hope or substance. That bucket now—a sip from it would rehabilitate them, give them at least the semblance of attainability. There lay relief from despair!

His mind flashed back to his father's rebuke and his answer: "Ye says I lays drunk. Thet's true, an' hit's a shameful thing fer a man ter admit. But hit's a thing I've got ter fight out fer myself."

A great indignation against his father's misunderstanding possessed him. He must fight in his own way! Even Blossom had only asked him not to drink "too much."

When it needed only an hour more for the coming of dawn, his face grew darkly sullen.

"Hit's hell thet I've got ter spend my whole life a brewin' ther stuff ergin my will—takin' chances of ther jail-house fer hit—an' yit I kain't have a drink when I'm wet ter ther bones," he growled.

Going as if drawn by a power stronger than his own volition, he moved balkingly, yet with inevitable progress once more to the bucket. He half filled the cup—raised it—and this time gulped it down greedily and recklessly to the bottom.

Immediately his chilled veins began to glow with an ardent gratefulness. The stars seemed brighter, and the little voices of the night became sweeter. The iron-bound gates of imagination swung wide to a pageantry of dreams, and as he crouched in the reeking underbrush, he half forgot his discontent.

Repeatedly he dipped and drained the cup. He was still on duty, but now he watched with a diminished vigilance. Gradually his senses became more blunt. The waking dreams were vaguer, too, and more absurd.

He still tended the fire under the kettle—but he laughed scornfully at the foolish need of keeping his face always in the shadow. Then suddenly he dropped down close to the dark earth, let the cup splash into the bucket, and thrust forward his rifle.

His ears had caught a sound which might have been a raccoon stirring in the brush—or a fox slipping covertly through the fallen hemlock top.

But there was no repetition, so he laughed again, and with the first pallid hint of dawn on the ridges he shook the shoulder of his sleeping companion. Then he himself sank down in the heavy torpor of exhaustion and drunkenness.

At the same time, because it would soon be light, the living creature which had made the sound began creeping away, and in doing so it avoided any other alarms. It was the figure of a man who had learned what he came to find out.

When Lone Stacy plodded up to his still-house some hours later he exchanged nods with the squat mountaineers whom he found there.

"Whar's Turner?" was his brief inquiry and the reply matched it in taciturnity. "In thar—a layin' drunk."

The father went over and looked scowlingly down at the prostrate figure stretched out awkwardly in open-mouthed stupor.

"I reckon," he announced succinctly, "thar hain't nothin' fer hit but ter suffer him ter sleep hit off." But when the hired man, Lee, was out of sight, his bearded face twitched in a spasm of distress.

When Rattler Webb had turned away from the tub-mill his brain was still half stunned from the jarring punishment of battle. He was thoroughly conscious only of deep chagrin and a gnawing hunger for reprisal.

From childhood he retained no tender memories. There was no one upon whom he had a claim of blood, and neighborhood report had not let him forget that he was a woods colt. In hill parlance a woods colt signifies one whose birth has been sanctioned by no prior rites of matrimony.

Since he could remember he had existed only by virtue of the same predatory boldness which gives the lean razor-back strength and innate craftiness to live.

Just now his whole large capacity for hatred was centered on Bearcat Stacy, yet since Bearcat's kinsmen peopled every creek and spring-branch of this country he could not be casually murdered.

Any word slipped to the ear of the revenue man might be traced to him, and after that he could no longer live among his native hills. Still, he reflected as he slowly rubbed his fingers along his uneven nose, time brings changes and chances. To have definite evidence against his enemy might some day be of advantage.

So Rattler did not ride home after his encounter at the mill. He took refuge, instead, in an abandoned cabin, of which he knew, strategically located within a mile of the place where he had guessed the Stacy family were making illicit whisky. While the storm raged, threatening to bring down the sagging roof timbers about his ears, he sat before its dead and ruined hearth, entertaining bitter thoughts.

Between midnight and dawn he stepped over the broken threshold and began his reconnaissance. For two hours he crouched, wet and cramped, in the laurel, near enough to throw a stone against the kettle of the primitive distillery—waiting for that moment of relaxed vigilance, when the figure that moved in the shadows should let a ray from the fire reveal its features.

When dawn had almost come his vigil was rewarded and he had turned away again.

Blossom Fulkerson knew none of these things at noon of the day following the fight at the mill when, in the road, she met Lone Stacy making his way back to his house for his midday dinner, but as the old man stopped and nodded she read trouble in his eyes.

"Air ye worrited about somethin', Mr. Stacy," she demanded, and for a little space the man stood hesitantly silent.

At last he hazarded. "Little gal, thar's a thing I'd like ter name ter ye. I reckon if anybody kin holp me hit mout be you."

The girl's eyes lighted with an instinctive sympathy—then shadowed with a premonition of what was coming.

"Is hit—about—Turner?"

The father nodded his head gravely. His eyes wore the harassed disquiet of a problem.

"Does ye mean thet he's—he's—" She broke off abruptly, and Lone Stacy answered her with unrelieved bluntness.

"He's a layin' up thar drunk ergin, an' he's got a gash on one shoulder thet's powder-burned. I reckon he's been engagin' in some manner of ruction."

For a moment the girl did not speak, but her cheeks paled and tears swam abruptly in her eyes. She raised one hand and brushed them fiercely away.

She had awakened this morning with a new and unaccountable happiness in her heart. In all the lilt and sparkle of the world and all the tunefulness of the young summer there had seemed a direct message to herself. In her memory she had been hearing afresh the crude but impassioned eloquence with which the boy had talked to her yesterday.

Now he lay up there at the distillery in the heavy sleep of the drunkard.

"Ther boy's all I've got," announced Lone Stacy with an unaccustomed break in his voice. "I reckon mebby ef I hadn't been so harsh I mout hev more influence with him." Then he turned abruptly on his heel and trudged on.

Blossom Fulkerson slipped into the woods and came to a sun-flecked ampitheater of rock and rhododendron, where the ferns grew lush and tall, by the sparkle of water. There she sank down and covered her face with her hands. Her sobs shook her for a while, and then washing the tears away, she knelt and prayed with a passionate simplicity. Sometimes she lifted a pale face and her lips twisted themselves pathetically in the earnestness of her prayer.

The Almighty, to whom she made her plea, and who knew everything, must know, even as she knew, that Turner Stacy was not like those rowdy youths who habitually disgraced the hills. That occasional smile which lurked with its inherent sweetness under his affected sullenness, must mean something.

Turner had always been her willing vassal, and "sometimes" she had supposed, though hitherto that had always seemed a vaguely distinct matter, like the purple haze on the horizon, they would be avowed sweethearts.

Yesterday, though, as she walked back from the meeting on the ridge it had seemed as if she had spent a moment in that languorous land, where the far mists drowse—and yet the glamour had not faded. She hadn't sought to analyze then, she had only felt a new thrill in her heart as she instinctively broke clusters of pink-hearted bloom from the laurel.

She left the woods after a while, and as she came out again to the high road, she heard a voice raised in the high-pitched, almost falsetto, minors of mountain minstrelsy.

It was not a pleasing voice, nor was the ballad a cheery one. As for the singer himself, the twisting of the way still concealed him from view, so that only his song proclaimed him.

"He stobbed her to ther heart an' she fell with a groan.
He threw a leetle dirt *ov*-er her, an' started fer home,"

wailed the dolorous voice of the traveler. There was a splashing of hoofs in shallow water, then a continuation:

"His debts ter ther devil now William must pay,
Fer he fell down an' died afore break of day."

So announced a mule plodded into sight, and upon his back, perching sidewise sat a tow-headed lout of a boy with staring, vacant eyes and a mouth which hung open, even when he desisted from song.

With an access of callow diffidence he halted his mount at sight of Blossom, staring with a nod and a bashful "Howdy."

"Howdy, Leander," accosted the girl. "How's all your folks?"

Leander White, of Crowfoot Branch, aged fifteen, gulped twice with prodigious and spasmodic play of his Adam's apple, before he eventually made shift to reply:

"They're all well—I'm obleeged—ter ye." Then, however, reassured by the cordial smile on the lips of Blossom Fulkerson, his power of speech and his hunger for gossip returned to him in unison.

"But old Aunt Lucy Hutton, over acrost ther branch, she fell down yistiddy an' broke a bone inside of her, though."

"Did she?" demanded the girl, readily sympathetic, and Leander, thus given sanction as a purveyor of tidings, nodded and gathered confidence. "Huh-huh, an' Revenuers raided Joe Simons's still-house on ther headwaters of Skinflint an' cyarried off a beautiful piece o' copper, atter they'd punched hit full o' holes."

"Revenuers!" Into the girl's voice now came a note of anxiety.

"Huh-huh, revenuers. Folks say they're gittin' bodaciously pesky these days."

"Ye ain't—ye ain't seen none of 'em yourself, have ye, Leander?" The question came a bit breathlessly, and the boy forgot his bashfulness as he expanded with the importance of his traveler's tales.

"Not to know 'em fer sich," he admitted, "but I met up with a furriner a few leagues back along ther highway. He was broguein' along mighty brash on his own two feet. La! But he was an elegant party ter be a ridin' on shoe-leather, though!"

"What manner of furriner was he, Leander?" demanded Blossom, with a clutch of fright at her heart. But the boy shook his head stupidly.

"Waal, he was jest a feller from down below. Ter tell hit proper, I didn't hev much speech with him. We jest met an' made our manners an' went our ways. He 'lowed ter go ter Lone Stacy's house."

"Lone Stacy's house," echoed the girl.

"Reckon I'll be a ridin' on," drawled the young horseman nonchalantly. "Reckon I've done told ye all the tidings I knows."

Blossom stood for a while rooted where he had left her, listening to the splash of the mule's feet along the creek. If a prying eye should discover the Stacy still today, it would find not only "a beautiful piece of copper," but Bearcat lying there incapacitated and helpless!

Her heart missed its beat at the thought. The hills seemed to close in on her stiflingly, with all their age-old oppression of fears and impending tragedies, and she sat down by the roadside to think it out. What should she do?

After a while she saw the tall figure of the elder Stacy climbing the mountainside, but he was taking a short cut, and would not come within hailing distance. Her eye, trained to read indications, noted that a rifle swung in his right hand.

Bitterly she had been taught by her father to resent the illicit business to which Turner's service was grudgingly given. But above all ethical hatred of lawbreaking rose the very present danger to Turner himself. Laws were abstract, and Turner was Turner!

There was only one answer. She must watch and, if need arose, give warning.

Just where the brook that trickled down from the still gushed out to the creek, and the road which followed its course, lay a steeply sloping field of young corn. Along its back grew rows of "shucky-beans," and here Blossom took her station for her self-appointed task of sentry duty.

CHAPTER V.

THE VOICE OF PROPHECY.

JERRY HENDERSON had lost his way. Aching muscles protested the extra miles, because back there at Marlin Town he had been advised to cross Cedar Mountain on foot.

"Unless they suspicions ye, most any man 'll contrive ter take ye in an' enjoy ye somehow," his counselors had pointed out. "But thar's heaps of them pore fam'lies over thar thet hain't got feed fer a ridin' critter noways."

Now, Cedar Mountain is not, as its name mendaciously implies, a single peak, but a chain that crawls, zigzag as herring-bone, more than a hundred miles of rocky barrier with few crossings which wheels can follow.

It is a wall twenty-five hundred feet high, separating the world from "back of beyond." Having scaled it since breakfast, Jerry Henderson was tired.

He was tanned and toughened like saddle-leather. He was broad of shoulder, narrow of thigh, and possessed of a good, resolute brow and a straight-cut jaw. His eyes were keen with intelligence and sufficiently cool with boldness.

Arriving at a narrow thread of clear water which came singing out at the edge of a corn-field, his eyes lighted with satisfaction. Tilled ground presumably denoted the proximity of a human habitation where questions could be answered.

So he stood, searching the forested landscape for a thread of smoke or a roof, and as he did so he perceived a movement at the edge of the field, where the stalks had grown higher than the average and merged with the confusion of the thicket.

Jerry turned and began making his way along the edge of the patch, respecting the

corn-rows by holding close to the tangle at the margin. Then suddenly, with a rustling of the shrubbery, as startling as the sound with which a covey of quail rises from nowhere, a figure stepped into sight, and the stranger halted in an astonishment which, had Blossom Fulkerson realized it, was the purest form of flattery.

He had seen many women and girls working in the fields as he had come along the way, and most of them had been heavy of feature and slovenly of dress. Here was one who might have been the spirit of the hills themselves in bloom; one who suggested kinship with the free skies and the sunlit foliage.

With frank delight in the astonished vision, Jerry Henderson stood there, his feet well apart, his pack still on his shoulders, and his lips parted in a smile of greeting and friendliness.

"Howdy," he said, but the girl stood motionless, vouchsafing no response.

"I'm a stranger in these parts," he volunteered easily, using the vernacular of the hills, "and I've strayed off my course. I was aiming to go to Lone Stacy's dwelling house."

Still she remained statuesque and voiceless, so the man went on: "Can you set me right? There seems to be a sort of a path here. Does it lead anywhere in particular?"

He took a step nearer and eased his pack to the ground among the briers of the blackberry bushes.

Abruptly, as if to bar his threatened progress, Blossom moved a little to the side obstructing the path. Into her eyes leaped a flame of Amazonian hostility and her hands clenched themselves tautly at her sides. Her lips parted and from her throat came a long, mellow cry not unlike the yodel of the Tyrol. It echoed through the timber and died away—and again she stood confronting him—wordless!

"I didn't mean to startle you," he declared reassuringly, "I only wanted information."

Again her far carrying but musical shout was sent through the quiet of the forest—his only answer.

"Since you won't answer my questions," said Jerry Henderson, irritated into capriciousness, "I think I'll see for myself where this path leads."

Instantly, then, she planted herself before him, with a violently heaving bosom and a wrathful quivering of her delicate nostrils. Her challenge broke tensely from her lips with a note of unyielding defiance.

"Ye can't pass hyar!"

"So you can talk, after all," he observed coolly. "It's a help to know that much anyhow."

He had chanced on a path he realized, which some moonshiner preferred keeping closed and the girl had been stationed there as a human declaration, "no thoroughfare."

Still he stood where he was and presently he had the result of his waiting.

A deep, masculine voice, unmistakable in the peremptoriness of its command sounded from the massed tangle of the hillsides. It pressed itself in the single word "Begone!" and Henderson was not fool enough to search the underbrush for a glimpse of his challenger.

"My name is Jerry Henderson and I was seeking to be shown my way," he said quietly, keeping his eyes, as he spoke studiously on the face of the girl.

"Begone! I'm a warnin' ye fa'r. Begone!"

The wayfarer shrugged his shoulders. Debate seemed impracticable, but his annoyance was not lessened as he recognized in the clear eyes of the young woman, a half-suppressed mockery of scorn and triumph.

Henderson stooped and hefted his pack again to his shoulders, adjusting it deliberately. If it must be retreat, he wished at least to retire with the honors of war. The girl's expression of scorn had piqued him into irascibility.

"I'd heard tell that folks hereabouts were civil to strangers," he announced bluntly. "And I don't give a damn about whatever secret you're bent on hiding from me."

Then he turned on his heel and started, not rapidly but with a leisurely stride to the road. He seemed to feel the eyes of the girl following him as he went, and his

spirit of resentment prompted an act of mild bravado as he halted by the rotten line of fence and unhurriedly tightened the lace of a boot.

"Hasten!" barked the warning voice from the laurel, but Henderson did not hasten. He acknowledged the disquieting surmise of a rifle trained him from the dense cover, but he neither looked back nor altered his pace. Then he heard a gun bark from the shrubbery and a bullet zip as it found its billet in a tree trunk above his head, but that he had expected. It was a demonstration in warning—not an attempt on his life. As long as he kept on his way, he believed hostilities would go no farther.

Without venturing to use his eyes, he let his ears do their best, and a satirical smile came to his lips as he heard a low, half-smothered scream of fright break from the lips of the girl whom he could no longer see.

And had he been able to study the golden-brown eyes just then he would have been even more compensated, for into them crept a slow light of admiration and astonished interest.

"He ain't nobody's coward anyways," she murmured as the figure of the unknown man swung out of sight around the bend, and some thought of the same sort passed through the mind of the elderly man in the thicket, bringing a grin but not an altogether humorless smile to his lips.

"Waal, I run him off," he mused, "but I didn't hardly run him noways hard!"

Jerry Henderson had borne credentials from Uncle Israel Calvert who kept a store on Big Ivy, and he had been everywhere told that once Uncle Billy had vised his passports, he would need no further safe-conduct.

In the encounter at the corn-field there had been no opportunity to show that bill of health and it was only after an hour spent in walking the wrong way, that its possessor met the next person to whom he could put questions. Then he learned that "Lone Stacy dwelt in a sizable house over on Little Slippery,"—but that he had strayed so far from the true course that now he must climb a mountain or take a détour, and that in either event he would have to hasten to arrive there before nightfall.

So the shadows were lengthening when he turned into the course of what must be "Little Slippery"—and came face to face with two men of generous stature, one elderly and the other youthful. He noted that the older of these men carried a rifle on his shoulder, and was conscious of a piercing scrutiny from both pairs of eyes.

"I'm seeking Lone Stacy," began Henderson, and the older face darkened into a momentary scowl of animosity with the coming of the curt reply:

"Thet's my name."

The traveler gave a violent start of astonishment. It was a deep-chested voice which, once heard, was not to be confused with other voices, and Jerry Henderson had heard it not many hours before raised in stentorian warning from the depth of the thickets. But promptly he recovered his poise and smiled.

"I have a piece of paper here," he said, "from Uncle Israel Calvert. He said that if he vouched for me you would be satisfied."

As Lone Stacy accepted the proffered note with his left hand he passed his rifle to the younger man with his right, and even then he held the sheet unopened for a space while his serious gaze swept the stranger slowly from head to foot in challenging appraisal.

He read slowly, with the knitted brows of the unscholastic, and as he did so the youth kept his eye on Henderson's face—and his finger on the trigger.

Having seen the boy's face, Henderson found it hard to shift his glance elsewhere. He had encountered many mountain faces that were sinister and vindictive, almost malign; but it was not the unyielding challenge which arrested him now. It was something far more individual and impressive. There are eyes that reflect light with the quicksilver responsiveness of mirrors. There are others, though more rare, which shine from an inner fire.

Bearcat Stacy's held the golden, unresting flame that one encounters in the tawny iris of a captive lion or eagle. Such eyes in a human face mean something, and it is

something which leads their possessor to the gallows or the throne. They are heralds of a spirit untamable and invincible; of the will to rend or rebuild.

Henderson found himself thinking of volcanoes which are latent but not extinct. It was a first glimpse; but if he never again saw this boy, who stood there measuring him in cool appraisal, he would always remember him as one remembers the few instantly convincing personalities one has brushed in walking through life.

But when Lone Stacy had finished his perusal, the nod of his head was an assurance of dissipated doubt. There was even a grave sort of courtesy in his manner now as he announced:

"Thet's good enough fer me. If Uncle Israel vouches fer ye, ye're welcome. Ye said yore name war Jerry Henderson, didn't ye?"

"That is my name," assented the newcomer, once more astonished. "But I didn't realize I'd told it yet."

With an outright scorn for subterfuge, the older man replied: "I reckon thar hain't no profit in a beatin' ther devil round ther stump. You've heered my voice afore—an' I've seed yore face. Ye tole me yore name back thar—in ther la'rel—didn't ye?"

Henderson bowed. "I *did* recognize your voice, but I didn't aim to speak of it—unless you did."

"When I says thet I trusts a man," the moonshiner spoke with an unambiguous quietness of voice, "I means what I says an' takes my chances accordin'. Ef a man betrays my confidence—" he paused just an instant, then added pointedly: "He takes his chances. What did ye 'low yore business war hyarbouts, Mr. Henderson?"

"I mean to explain that to you in due time, Mr. Stacy; but now it takes fewer words to say what's not my business."

"Waal, then, what hain't yore business?"

"Other people's business."

"Waal, so far as hit goes, thet's straight talk. I favors outright speech myself, an' ye don't seem none mealy-mouthed. Ye talks right fer yoreself—like a mountain man."

"You see," said Henderson calmly, "I am a mountain man, even if I've dwelt down below for some years."

"You—a mountain man?" echoed the bearded giant in bewilderment, and the visitor nodded.

"Ever hear of 'Torment' Henderson?" he inquired.

"Colonel Torment Henderson! Why, hell's fiddle, man, my daddy sarved under him in ther war over slavery! I was raised up on stories of how he tuck thet thar name of Torment in battle."

"He was my grandpap," the stranger announced, dropping easily into the phrases of the country.

"Mr. Henderson," said the old man, drawing himself up a trifle straighter. "We're pore folks, but we're proud ter hev ye enjoy what little we've got. This hyar's my son, Turner Stacy."

Then Bearcat spoke for the first time: "I reckon ye be leg-weary, Mr. Henderson. I'll fotch yore contraptions ter ther house."

There remained to the splendidly resilient powers of Bearcat's physical endowment no trace of last night's debauch except that invisible aftermath of desperate chagrin and mortification. As he lifted the pack which Henderson had put down, something like admiring wonderment awoke in him. Here was a man born like himself in the hills, reared in crude places, who yet bore himself with the air of one familiar with the world, and who spoke with the fluency of education.

As the wearied traveler trudged along with his two hosts, he had, glowing before his eyes, the final fires of sunset over hills that grew awesomely somber and majestic under the radiance of gold and ash of rose. Then they reached a gate where a horse stood hitched, and before them bulked the dark shape of a house whose open door was a yellow slab of lamplight.

From the porch as they came up rose a gray figure in the neutrality of the dying light; a man with a patriarchal beard that fell over his breast and an upper lip clean shaven, like a Mormon elder. Even in that dimness a rude dignity seemed inherent to this man, and as Henderson glanced at him

he heard Lone Stacy declaring, "Brother Fulkerson, ye're welcome. This hyar is Mr. Henderson." Then turning to the guest the householder explained. "Brother Fulkerson air ther preacher of God's word hyarabouts. He's a friend ter every Christian an' a rescuer of sinners."

As the stranger acknowledged this presentation he glanced up, and, standing in the light from the door, found himself face to face with yet another figure; the figure of a girl who was silhouetted there in profile, for the moment seemingly frozen motionless by astonishment. Her face was flooded with the pinkness of a deep blush, and her slender beauty was as undeniable as an axiom.

Lone Stacy turned with an amused laugh. "An' this, Mr. Henderson," he went on, "air Brother Fulkerson's gal, Blossom. I reckon ye two hev met a'fore—albeit ye didn't, in a way of speakin', make yore manners ther fust time."

Blossom bowed, then she laughed shyly, but with a delicious quality of music in her voice.

"I reckon ye 'lowed I didn't know nothin'—I mean anything—about manners, Mr. Henderson," she confessed, and the man hastily assured her:

"I 'lowed that you were splendidly loyal —to somebody."

As he spoke he saw Bearcat Stacy at his elbow, his eyes fixed on the girl with a wordless appeal of contrition and devotion, and he thought he understood.

"Howdy, Blossom," murmured Turner, and the girl's chin came up. Her voice seemed to excommunicate him as she replied briefly: "Howdy, Turner."

This was a lover's quarrel, surmised Henderson, and discreetly he turned again to the host, but, even so, he saw Turner step swiftly forward and raise his hands. His lips were parted to speak and his eyes full of supplication, but he did not speak. He only let his arms fall and turned away with a face of stricken misery.

Blossom knew about last night, reflected Bearcat. He was, as he deserved to be, in disgrace.

Then, as the girl stood looking off into the gathering darkness her own face filled wistfully with pain, and the boy, dropping to a seat on the floor of the porch, watched her covertly with sidewise glances.

"Blossom met me down ther road," observed the minister, "an' named ter me thet she hed—" He paused, casting a dubious glance at the stranger, and Lone Stacy interrupted: "She named ter ye thet she stood guard at ther still an' warned Mr. Henderson off?"

Brother Fulkerson nodded gravely. "I was a little mite troubled in my mind lest she'd put herself in jeopardy of ther law. Thet's why I lighted down an' hitched hyar: ter hev speech with ye."

"Ye needn't worrit yoreself none, Brother Fulkerson," reassured the host. "Mr. Henderson comes, vouched fer by Uncle Israel."

The preacher sat for a space silent, and when he next spoke it was still with a remnant of misgiving in his tone.

"I don't aim to go about crossin' good men and a cavilin' with thar opinions," he began apologetically. "Like as not heaps of 'em air godlier men than me; but I holds it to be my duty to speak out free." Again he paused and cast a questioning glance at his host as though in deference to the hospitality of the roof, and the tall mountaineer, standing beside the post of his porch, nodded assent with equal gravity.

"Talk right fer yoreself, Brother Fulkerson. I don't never aim ter muzzle no man's speech."

"Waal, this day I've rid some twenty miles acrost high ridges and down inter shadowy valleys. I've done traversed some places thet war powerful wild an' laurely. Wharsoever God's work calls me, I'm obleeged ter go, but I raised my voice in song as I fared along among them thickets, lest some man thet I couldn't see; some man a layin' on watch, mout suspicion I was seekin' ter discover somethin' he aimed ter keep hid—jest as ye suspicioned Mr. Henderson hyar."

Lone Stacy stroked his beard.

"I reckon thet war ther wisest way, Brother Fulkerson, unless every man over thar knowed ye."

"I reckon God likes ther songs of his birds better," declared the preacher, "then

ther song of a man thet hes ter sing ter protect his own life. I reckon no country won't ever prosper mightily, whilst hit's a land of hidin' out with rifle guns in ther laurel."

There was no wrath in the eyes of the host as he listened to his guest's indictment or the voice of thrilling earnestness in which it was delivered. He only raised one hand and pointed upward where a mighty shoulder of mountain rose hulking through the twilight. Near its top one could just make out the threadlike whiteness of a new fence line.

"Yonder's my corn patch," he said. "When I cl'ared hit an' grubbed hit out my neighbors all came ter ther workin', an' amongst us we toiled thar from sunup twell one o'clock ther next night—daylight an' moonlight. On thet patch I kin raise me two or three master crops o' corn, an' atter thet hit won't hardly raise rag weeds! A bushel o' thet corn, sledded over ter ther nighest store fotches in mebby forty cents. But thar's two gallons of licker in hit, an' thet's wuth money. Who's a goin' ter deny me ther rightful license ter do hit?"

"Ther law denies ye," replied the preacher gravely but without acerbity.

"Thar's things thet's erginst ther law," announced the old man with a swift leaping of fierceness in his tone, "an' thar's things thet's above ther law. A criminal is a man thet's done befouled his own self-respect. I hain't never done thet, an' I hain't no criminal. What do you think, Mr. Henderson?"

Henderson had no wish to be drawn so soon into the conflict of local opinion, yet he realized that a candid reply was expected.

"My opinion is that of theory only," he responded seriously. "But I agree with Brother Fulkerson. A community with secrets to hide is a hermit community—and one of the strangers that is frightened away—is prosperity."

Bearcat Stacy, brooding silently in his place, looked suddenly up. Hitherto he had seen only the sweet wistfulness of Blossom's eyes. Now he remembered the words of the old miller.

"Some day a mountain man will rise up as steadfast as the hills he sprung from, an' he'll change hit all like ther sun changes fog!" Perhaps Turner Stacy was ripe for hero-worship.

Over the mountain top appeared the beacon of the evening star—luminous but pale. As if saluting it the timber became wistful with the call of whippoorwills and fireflies began to flit against the sooty curtain of night.

Something stirred in the boy, as though the freshening breeze brought the new message of an awakening. Here was the talk of wise men, concurring with the voices of his dreams. But at that moment his mother appeared in the doorway and announced:

"You men kin come in an' eat, now."

CHAPTER VI.

LORD OF THE LAWLESS.

IN former days an Appalachian tavern was a "quarter-house"; a hostelry where one paid a quarter for one's bed and a quarter each for meals. Now the term has fallen into such disuse as to be no longer generic, but locally it survived with a meaning both specific and malodorous. The press of Kentucky and Virginia had used it often, coupled with lurid stories of blood-lettings and orgies, linking the name of the house always with that of its proprietor, Kinnard Towers.

How could such things go on in the twentieth century, questioned the readers of these news columns, forgetting that this ramparted isolation lives not in the twentieth century, but still in the eighteenth; that its people who have never seen salt water still sing the ballads of Walter Raleigh's sea-rovers, and that from their lips still fall, warm with every-day usage, the colloquiallisms of Chaucer and of *Piers Plowman*.

The quarter-house stood in a cleft where the mountains had been riven. Its front door opened into Virginia and its rear door gave into Kentucky.

Across the puncheon floor was humorously painted a stripe of whitewash, as constantly renewed as the markings of a

well-kept tennis-court, and that line was a State boundary.

Hither flocked refugees from the justice of two States, and if a suddenly materializing sheriff confronted his quarry in the room where each day and each night foregathered the wildest spirits of a wild land, the hounded culprit had only to cross that white line and stand upon his lawful demand for extradition papers. Here, therefore, the hunted foxes of the law ran to ground. The man who presided as proprietor was a power to be feared, admired, hated as individual circumstance dictated, but in any case one whose wrath was not to be advisedly stirred.

He had found it possible to become wealthy in a land where such achievement involves battening on poverty. Cruel—suave, predatory—charitable, he had taken life by his own hand and that of the hireling, but also he had, in famine times, succored the poor.

He had, in short, awed local courts and intimidated juries of the vicinage until he seemed beyond the law and until office-holders wore his collar.

Kinnard Towers was floridly blond of coloring, mild of eye and urbanely soft-spoken of voice.

Once, almost two decades ago, while the feud was still eruptive, it had seemed advisable to him to have Lone Stacy done to death and to that end he had bargained with Black Tom Carmichael.

Black Tom had been provided with a double-barreled gun, loaded with buckshot and placed in a thicket which, at the appointed hour, the intended victim must pass. But it had chanced that fate intervened. On that day Lone Stacy had carried in his arms his baby son, Turner Stacy, and, seeing the child, Black Tom had faltered.

Later in the seclusion of a room over the quarter-house the employer had wrathfully taken his churl to task.

"Waal, why didn't ye git him?" was the truculent interrogation. "He passed by close enough fer ye ter hit him with a rock."

"He was totin' his baby," apologized the designated assassin shamefacedly, yet with a sullen obstinacy. "I was only hired ter kill a growed-up man. Ef ye'd a give me a rifle-gun like I asked ye 'stid of a scatter-gun I could've got him through his damned head an' not harmed ther child none. Thet's why I held my hand."

Kinnard Towers had scornfully questioned: "What makes ye so tormentin' mincy erbout ther kid? Don't ye know full well thet when he grows up we'll hev ter git him, too? Howsoever, next time I'll give ye a rifle-gun."

Like all unlettered folk, the mountaineer is deeply suspicious and prone to believe in portents and wonders. Often, though he can never be brought to confess it, he gives credence to tales of sorcery and witchcraft.

Turner Stacy was from his birth a "survig'rous" child, and he was born on the day of the eclipse. As he came into the world the sun was darkened. Immediately after that a sudden tempest broke which tore the forests to tatters, swelled quiet brooks to swirling torrents, unroofed houses and took its toll of human life. Even in after years, when men spoke of "big storm" they always alluded to that one.

An old crone who was accounted able to read fortunes and work charms announced that Turner Stacy came into life on the wings of that storm and that the sun darkened its face because his birth savored of the supernatural. This being so, she said, he was immune from any harm of man's devising. Her absurd story was told and retold around many a smoky cabin hearth, and there were those who believed it.

Later, Black Tom was given a rifle and again stationed in ambush. Again Lone Stacy, favored by chance, carried his baby son in his arms. Black Tom, whose conscience had never before impeded his action, continued to gaze over his gun-sights, without pressing the trigger.

Towers was furious, but Carmichael could only shake his head in a frightened bewilderment as if he had seen a ghost.

"Ther brat looked at me jest as I was about to fire," he protested. "His eyes didn't look like a human bein's. He hain't no baby—he was born a man, or somethin' more then a man."

As affairs developed, the truce was arranged soon afterward, and also the marked

man's death was no longer essential, because he was safe in prison.

Neither Lone Stacy nor his son had ever known of this occurrence, and now the Stacys and the Towers met on the road and "made their manners" without gun-play.

But to Kinnard Towers local happenings remained vital and, for all his crudity, few things of topical interest occurred of which he was not duly apprised.

Into his dwelling-place came one day the Hon. Abraham Towers, his nephew, who sat in the State Legislature at Frankfort. The two were closeted together for an hour and as the nephew emerged, at the end of the interview, Kinnard walked with him to the hitching-post where the visitor's horse stood tethered.

"I'm obleeged ter ye, Abe," he said graciously. "When this man Henderson gits hyar, I'll make hit a point ter hev casual speech with him. I aims ter l'arn his business, an' ef what ye suspicions air true, he'll have dealin's with me, or else he won't hardly succeed."

So it happened logically that on the evening of Jerry's arrival Kinnard Towers mounted and started out over the hill trails. He rode, as he always did when he went far abroad, under armed escort, since tyrants are never secure. Four rifle-equipped vassals accompanied him, two riding as advance guard and two in the rear.

Kinnard's destination was the house of Lone Stacy on Little Slippery, a house whose threshold he could not, in the old days, have crossed without blood-letting; but these were the days of peace.

Arriving, he did not go direct to the door and knock, but discreetly halting in the highway, lifted his voice and shouted aloud, "Halloo! I'm Kinnard Towers an' I'm a comin' in."

The door was thrown promptly open and Lone Stacy appeared, framed between threshold and lintel, holding a lamp aloft and offering welcome.

"Gentlemen," said the host in a matter-of-fact voice, "ef you'll excuse me I'll rest yore guns."

Then, in observance of a quaint and ancient ceremonial, each armed guardian passed in, surrendering his rifle at the threshold. In retarded Appalachia, so runs the rule. To fail in its fulfilment is to express distrust for the honesty and ability of the householder to protect his guests, and such an implication constitutes a grave discourtesy.

Inside, a fire roared on the hearth, for, though it be June, the mountain nights are raw.

Henderson, watching the small cavalcade troop in, smiled inwardly. He was not unmindful of the identity or the power of this modern baron, and he was not without suspicion that he himself was the cause of the visit.

"I chanced ter be farin' by, Lone," Kinnard Towers enlightened his host easily, "an' I 'lowed I'd light down an' rest a leetle spell."

"Ye're welcome," was the simple reply. "Draw up ter ther fire an' set ye a cheer."

The talk lingered for a space on neighborhood topics, but the host had found time between hearing the shout outside and replying to it, to say in a low voice to his guest: "I reckon atter Kinnard Towers comes in we won't talk no more erbout my still—jest stills in gin'ral," and that caution was religiously observed.

The kitchen tasks had been finished now and while the men sat close to the smoking hearth the faces of the women looked on from the shadowed corners of the room, where they sat half-obscured upon the huge four-posted beds.

The man who had crossed Cedar Mountain lighted his pipe from the bed of coals and then, straightening up, he stood on the hearth where his eyes could take in the whole semicircle of listening faces. They were eyes that, for all their seeming of a theorist's engrossment, missed little.

This house might have been a pioneer abode of two hundred years ago, standing unamended by the whole swelling tide of modernity that had passed it by untouched.

The leaping blaze glittered on the metal of polished rifles stacked in a corner, and on two others hanging against the smoke-dimmed logs of the walls. Red pods of peppers and brown leaves of tobacco were

strung along the rafters. Hardly defined of shape against one shadowy wall, stood a spinning-wheel.

Henderson knew that the room was pregnant with the conflict of human elements. He realized that he himself faced possibilities which made his mission here a thing of delicate manipulation; even of personal danger.

The blond man with the heavy neck who sat contemplatively chewing at the stem of an unlighted pipe, listened in silence. He hardly seemed interested, but Henderson recognized him for the sponsor and beneficiary of lawlessness. He more than any other would be the logical foe to a new order which brought the law in its wake—and the law's reckonings.

Near to the enemy whom he had heretofore faced in pitched battle, sat old Lone Stacy, his brogans kicked off and his bare feet thrust out to the warmth; bearded, shrewd of eye, a professed lover of the law, asking only the exemption of his illicit still. He, too, in the feud days had wielded power, but had sought to wield it for peace.

And there, showing no disposition to draw aside the skirts of his raiment in disgust, was the preacher of the hills whose strength lay in his ability to reconcile antagonisms, while yet he stood stanch, abating nothing of self-sacrificial effort. It was almost as though church and crown and commoner were gathered there in informal conclave.

But luminous, like fixed stars, gleamed two other pair of eyes. As he realized them, Henderson straightened up with such a thrill as comes from a vision. Here were the eyes of builders of the future—agleam as they looked on the present! Blossom's were wide and enthralled and Turner Stacy's burned as might those of a young crusader hearing from the lips of old and seasoned knights recitals of the wars of the Sepulcher.

Bearcat Stacy saw in this stranger the prophet bearing messages for which he had longed—and waited almost without hope. But Kinnard Towers saw in him a dangerous and unsettling agitator.

"You said," declared Henderson, when the theme had swung back again to economic discussion, "that your corn-field was good for a few crops and then the rains would wash it bare, yet as I came along the road I saw an outcropping vein of coal that reached above my head, and on each side of me were magnificent stretches of timber that the world needs and that is growing scarce."

"Much profit thet does me," Lone Stacy laughed dryly. "Down at Uncle Israel's store thar's a dollar bill thet looks like hit's a layin' on ther counter—but when ye aims ter pick it up ye discerns thet hits pasted under ther glass. Thet coal an' timber of mine air pasted ter ther wrong side of Cedar Mounting."

"And why? Because there are few roads and fewer schools. It's less the cost and difficulties of building wagon roads than something else that stands in the way. It's the laurel."

"The laurel?" repeated Lone Stacy, but the preacher nodded comprehendingly, and the visitor went on:

"Yes. The laurel. I've been in Central American jungles where men died of fever because the thick growth held and bred the miasma. Here the laurel holds a spirit of concealment. If there wasn't a bush in all these hills big enough to hide a man, the country would be thrown open to the markets of the world. It's the spirit of hiding—that locks life in and keeps it poor."

"I presume ye means on account of ther blockade licker," replied the host, "but thet don't tech the root of the matter. How erbout the fields thet stand on end; fields thet kain't be plowed an' thet rains brings down on yore head, leavin' nuthin' thar but ther rock?"

Henderson had the power of convincing words abetted by a persuasive quality of voice. As a mountain man he preached his faith in the future of the hills. He spoke of the vineyards of Madeira where slopes as incorrigibly steep as these were redeemed by terracing. He talked of other lands that were being exhausted of resources and turning greedy eyes upon the untapped wealth of the Cumberlands. He painted the picture glowingly and fervently, and Turner Stacy, listening, bent forward with a new fire in his eyes: a fire

which Kinnard Towers did not fail to mark.

"When ther railroad taps us," interpolated Lone Stacy, in a pause, "mebbe we kin manage ter live. Some says ther road aims ter cross Cedar Mounting."

"Don't deceive yourself with false hopes," warned the visitor. "This change must be brought about from inside—not outside. The coming of the railroad lies a decade or two away. I've investigated that question pretty thoroughly and I know. The corn-fields are so large that railroads can still, for a long time to come, choose the less expensive routes. Cedar Mountain balks them for the present. It will probably balk them for the length of our lives—but this country can progress without waiting for that."

"So ye thinks thet even without no railroad this God-forsaken land kin prosper," inquired the host skeptically, and the visitor answered promptly:

"I do. I am so convinced of it that I'm here to buy property—to invest all I have and all my mother and sisters have. I think by introducing the methods of intensive farming, I can make it pay a moderate return in my own time — and when I die I'll leave property that will make the younger generations rich. I don't think it can make me rich in my lifetime—but some day it's a certainty of millions."

"Why don't ye buy yoreself property whar ther railroad will come in yore own day, then? Wouldn't thet pay ye better?"

The suggestion was the first contribution to the conversation that had come from Kinnard Towers, and it was proffered in a voice almost urbane of tone.

Henderson turned toward him.

"That's a straight question and I'll answer it straight. To buy as much property as I want along a possible railway line would cost too much money. I'm gambling, not on the present, but on the future. I come here because I know the railroad is not coming, and for that reason prices will be moderate."

As he made this explanation the newcomer was watching the face of his questioner almost eagerly. What he read there might spell the success or failure of his plans. Any enterprise across which Kinnard Towers stamped the word "prohibited" was an enterprise doomed to great vicissitude in a land where his word was often above the law.

But the blond and florid man granted him the satisfaction of no reply. He gazed pensively at the logs crackling on the hearth and his features were as inscrutably blank as those of the sphinx.

After a moment Towers did speak, but it was to his host and on another topic.

"Lone," he said, "thet firewood of yourn's right green an' snappy, hain't hit? Hit pops like ther Fo'th of July."

Brother Fulkerson spoke reflectively: "We needs two more things then we've got in these hills—an' one thing less then we've got. We wants roads an' schools—and the end of makin' white licker."

Henderson saw Blossom slip from the bed and flit shadowlike through the door, and a few moments later he missed, too, the eagerly attentive presence of the boy. Blossom had escaped from the reek of tobacco smoke inside, to the soft cadences of the night-song and the silver wash of the moonlight.

Turner Stacy found her sitting, with her face between her palms, under a great oak that leaned out across the trickle of the creek, and when he spoke her name, she raised eyes, glistening with tears.

"Blossom," he began in a contrite voice, "ye're mad at me, ain't ye? Ye've done heered about—about last night." Then he added with moody self-accusation, "God knows I don't blame ye none!"

She turned her head away and did not at once answer. Suddenly her throat choked and she broke into sobs that shook her with their violence. The young man stood rigid, his face drawn with self-hatred, and at last she looked up at him.

"Somehow, Turner," she said unsteadily, "hit wouldn't of been jest ther same ef hit had been any other time. Yestiddy—up thar on ther ridge—ye promised me thet ye'd be heedful with licker."

"I knows I did," he declared bitterly. "Ye've got a right ter plumb hate me."

"If I'd 'a' hated ye," she reminded him simply, "I wouldn't sca'cely have watched

ther road all day." Then irrelevantly she demanded, "How did ye git yore shoulder hurt?"

The wish to defend himself with the palliations of last night's desperate fatigue and the chill in his wound was a strong temptation, but he repressed it. Knowledge of his encounter with Rattler Webb would only alarm her and conjure up fears of unforgiving vengeance.

"Hit war just a gun thet went off accidental like," he prevaricated. "I wasn't harmed none, Blossom." Then in a tense voice he continued: "I only aimed to drink a leetle—not too much—an' then, somehow, I didn't seem ter hev ther power ter quit."

He felt the lameness of that plea and broke off.

"I'd been studyin' about what you said on ther ridge," she told him falteringly, and the tone of her voice electrified him. Again the mountains on their ancient foundations grew unsteady before his eyes.

"Does ye mean thet—thet, despite last night—ye keers fer me?"

He bent forward, lips parted and heart pounding—and her reply was an unsteady whisper.

"I hain't plumb dead sartain yit, Turner, but—but this mornin' I couldn't think of nothin' else but you."

"Blossom!" exclaimed the boy, his voice ringing with a solemn earnestness. "I don't want thet ye shall hev ter feel shame fer me—but—"

Once again the words refused to come. The girl had risen now and stood slender in the silver light, her lashes wet with tears. With that picture in his eyes it became impossible to balance the other problems of his life. So he straightened himself stiffly and turned his gaze away from her. He was seeing instead a picture of the squat shanty where the copper-worm was at work in the shadow, and for him it was a picture of bondage.

So she waited, feeling some hint of realization for the struggle his eyes mirrored.

There would be many other wet nights up there, he reflected as his jaw set itself grimly; many nights of chilled and aching bones with that wild thirst creeping seductively, overpoweringly upon him out of the darkness. There would be the clutch of longing, strangling his heart, and gnawing at his stomach.

But if he did promise and failed, he could never again recover his self-respect. He would be doomed. With his face still averted from her, he spoke huskily and laboriously.

"I reckon thar hain't no way ter make ye understand, Blossom. I don't drink like some folks, jest ter carouse. I don't offentimes want ter tech hit, but seems like sometimes I jest has ter hev hit. Hit's most gin'rally when I'm plumb sick of livin' on hyar withouten no chance ter better myself."

Even in the moonlight she could see that his face was drawn and pallid. Then abruptly he wheeled:

"Ther Stacys always keeps thar bonds. I reckons ye wants me ter give ye my hand thet I won't never tech another drop, Blossom, but I kain't do thet yit—I've got ter fight hit out fust an' be plumb, dead sartain thet I could keep my word ef I gave hit—"

Blossom heard her father calling her from the porch, and as she seized the boy's arms she found them set as hard as rawhide.

"I understand, Turner," she declared hastily, "an'—an'—I'm a goin' ter pray fer ye afore I lays down ter night."

As Turner watched the preacher mount and ride away, his daughter walking alongside, he did not return to the house. He meant to fight it out in his own way. Last night when the hills had rocked to the fury of the storm he had surrendered. To-night when the moonlit slopes drowsed in the quiet of silver mists, the storm was in himself. Within a few feet of the gate he took his seat at the edge of a thick rhododendron bush, where the shadow blotted him into total invisibility. He sat there drawn of face and his hands clenched and unclenched themselves. He did not know it, but in his silence and darkness, he was growing. There was for him a touch of Golgotha in those long moments of reflection and something of that anguished concentration which one sees in Rodin's figure of "The Thinker"—

that bronze man bent in the melancholy travail of the birth of thought.

When an hour later Kinnard Towers and his cortège trooped out of Lone Stacy's house, Jerry Henderson, willing to breathe the freshness of the night, strolled along.

The men with the rifles swung to their saddles and rode a few rods away, but Towers himself still paused, and at last, with a steady gaze upon the stranger, made a tentative suggestion.

"I don't aim ter discourage a man thet's got fine ideas, Mr. Henderson," he said, "but hev ye duly considered thet when ye undertakes ter wake up a country thet's been sleepin', as ye puts it, fer two centuries, ye're right apt to find some sleepy heads thet would rather be—left alone?"

"I'm not undertaking a revolution," smiled the new arrival. "I'm only aiming to show folks, by my own example, how to better themselves."

The man who stood as the sponsor of the old order mounted and looked down from his saddle.

"Hain't thet right smart like a doctor a comin' in ter cure a man," he inquired dryly, "afore ther sick person hes sent fer him? Sometimes ther ailin' one moutn't take hit kindly."

"I should say," retorted Henderson blandly, "that it's more like the doctor who hangs out his shingle—so that men can come if they like."

There was a momentary silence, and at its end Towers spoke again with just a hint of the enigmatical in his voice.

"Ye spoke in thar of havin' personal knowledge thet ther railroad didn't aim ter come acrost Cedar Mounting, didn't ye?"

"Yes."

"Well, now, Mr. Henderson—not meanin' ter dispute ye none—I don't feel so sartain about thet."

"I spoke from fairly definite information."

The man on horseback nodded.

"I aims ter talk pretty plain. We're a long ways behind ther times up hyar, an' thet means thet we likes ter sort of pass on folks thet comes ter dwell amongst us."

"I call that reasonable, Mr. Towers."

"I'm obleeged ter ye. Now jest let's suppose thet ther railroad did aim ter come in atter all, an' let's jest suppose, fer ther fun of ther thing, thet hit likewise aimed ter grab off all ther best coal an' timber rights afore ther pore, ign'rant mountain men caught on ter what war happenin'. In sich a case, ther fust step would be ter send a man on ahead, wouldn't hit—a mountain man, if possible—ter preach thet ther railroad didn't aim ter come? Thet would mean bargains, wouldn't hit?"

Jerry Henderson laughed aloud.

"Do you mean that you suspect me of such a mission?"

Glancing about to assure himself that no one heard him except his single auditor, the erstwhile hirer of assassins bent over his saddle pommel. Into the suavity of his voice had crept a new hardness and into the pale color of his eyes an ominous glint.

"Back in ther days of ther war with England, Mr. Henderson, I've heered tell thet our grandsires hed a flag with a rattlesnake on hit, an' ther words 'Don't tread on me!' Some folks says we're right smart like our grandsires back hyar in ther timber."

"If that's a threat, Mr. Towers," said Henderson steadily, "I make it a point never to understand them."

"An' I makes hit a point never ter give them more then wunst. I don't say I suspicions ye—but I do p'intedly say this ter ye. Whatever yore real project air, afore ye goes inter hit too deep—afore ye invests all ye've got, an' all yore mother hes got, an' all yore sister hes got, it mout be right heedful ter ride over ter my dwellin'-house an' hev speech with me."

An indignant retort rose to Jerry's lips, but with diplomatic forbearance he repressed it.

"When I've been here a while, I guess your suspicions will be allayed without verbal assurances, Mr. Towers."

"Even if ye only comes preachin' ther drivin' out of licker," said Towers slowly, "ye're treadin' on my friends. We suffers Sabbath talk like thet from preachers, but we don't relish hit on week-days from

strangers. In thar a while back I listened. I seen ye an' Brother Fulkerson a stirrin' up an' onsettlin' ther young folks. I kin feel ther restless things thet's a ridin' in ther wind ter-night, Mr. Henderson, an' hit hain't sca'cely right ter bring trouble on these folks thet's shelterin' ye."

Bearcat Stacy, unseen but eagerly listening, felt a leaping of resentment in his veins. All the feudal instincts that had their currents there woke to wrath as he heard his hereditary enemy warning away his guest. It was the intolerable affront of a hint that the power of the Stacy's had dwindled and waned until it could no longer secure the protection of its own roof-trees.

With the anger of *Marmion* for *Angus*, sternly repressed but forceful, Bearcat suddenly stood out revealed in the moonlight. He had only to take a step, but the effect was precisely that of having been suddenly materialized out of nothingness, and when his voice announced him even the case-hardened control of Kinnard Towers suffered a violent jolt of surprise.

"I reckon, Kinnard Towers," said the boy with a velvety evenness of voice, "ther day hain't hardly come yit when ther Stacys hes ter ask ye what visitors they kin take inter thar dwellin'-houses. I reckon mebby Mr. Henderson's idees may suit some folks hyarabouts, even ef they don't pleasure you none. So long as he aims ter tarry hyar, an' we aims ter enjoy him, ther man thet seeks ter harm him will hev ter come hyar an' git him."

Never since the feud had ended in a pact of peace had two factional leaders come so near a rupture. Henderson could feel the ominous tensity in the air, but Towers himself only shook his head and laughed. It was a good-humored laugh, since this was not the time for open enmity.

"Oh, pshaw, son! I reckon nobody don't aim to harm Mr. Henderson. I jest knows this country, an' he ought ter realize thet my counsel mout help him." There was a brief pause and then with an audacity of bantering Kinnard proceeded. "I've done heered that ye tuck yore dram wunst in a while yoreself—mebbe you've got friends thet makes licker—an' you knows how they mout feel about too much talk."

Bearcat Stacy stood with his shoulders drawn back and his eyes smoldering.

"Thet's my business," he retorted curtly, but the quarter-house baron went on with the same teasing smile.

"Mebbe so, son, but hit kinderly 'peared like ter me thet Brother Fulkerson's gal war a 'lowin' thet hit war her business, too. I overheered yore maw say somethin' 'bout yore drinkin' some last night, an' I seed Blossom's purty eyes flash."

The mounted man waved his hand and rode away, his escort falling in at front and rear, but when the cavalcade had turned the angle of the road Kinnard Towers beckoned Black Tom Carmichael to his side and spoke grimly.

"Thar's trouble breedin', Tom, an' this young Bearcat Stacy's in ther bilin'. Ye played ther fool when ye failed ter git him as a kid. Hit war only a layin' up torment erginst ther future."

Henderson lay long awake that night in the loft which he shared with Bearcat. He heard the snores of the man and woman sleeping below, but the unmoving figure beside him had not relaxed in slumber. Henderson wondered if he were reflecting upon that talk by the gate and all the dark possibilities it might presage.

It was almost dawn when Bearcat slipped from under his quilt, drew on his shoes and trousers, and left the loftlike attic, his feet making no sound on the rungs of the ladder.

What furtive mission was taking him out, pondered Henderson, into the laurel-masked hills at that hour?

But out in the creek-bed road, with the setting moon on his face, Bearcat Stacy paused and drank in a long breath.

"He seen Blossom's eyes flash, he said," murmured the boy with his hands clenched at his sides; then he threw back his shoulders and spoke half aloud and very resolutely: "Waal, they won't never hev ter flash no more fer thet cause." After a little while, his gaze fixed on the myriad stars, he spoke again. "God Almighty, I needs thet Ye should holp me now. I aims ter go dry fer all time—an' I kain't hardly compass hit withouten Ye upholds me."

Wheeling abruptly, he went with long strides around the turn of the road. A half-hour later he was noiselessly opening the gate of the preacher's house. He meant to wait there until Blossom awoke, but, prompted by habit, he gave, thrice repeated, the quavering and perfectly counterfeited call of a barn-owl. Since she had been a very small girl that had been their signal, and though she would not hear it now it pleased him to repeat it.

Then, to his astonishment, he heard very low the whining creak of an opening door, and there before him, fully dressed, intently awake, stood the girl herself.

"Blossom," said Bearcat in a low voice that trembled a little—"Blossom, I came over ter wait hyar till ye woke up. I came ter tell ye—thet I'm ready ter give ye my hand. I hain't never goin' ter tech a drap of licker no more so long es I lives. I says hit ter ye with God Almighty listenin'."

"Oh, Turner!" she exclaimed; then her voice broke and her eyes swam with tears. "I'm—I'm right proud of ye," was all she could find the words to add.

"Did I wake ye up?" demanded the boy in a voice of self-accusation. "I didn't aim to. I 'lowed I'd wait till mornin'."

Blossom shook her head. "I hain't been asleep yit," she assured him. Her cheeks flushed and she drooped her head as she explained. "I've been a prayin', Turner. God's done answered my prayer."

Turner Stacy took off his hat and shook back the hair that fell over his forehead. Beads of moisture stood out on his temples. "Did ye keer—thet much, Blossom?" he humbly questioned.

Suddenly the girl threw both arms about his neck. "I keers all a gal kin keer, Turner. I wasn't sartain afore—but I knowed hit es soon as I begun prayin' fer ye."

Standing there in the pallid mistiness before dawn, and yielding her lips to the pressure of his kiss, Blossom felt the almost religious solemnity of the moment. She was crossing the boundary of acknowledged love—and he had passed through the stress of terrific struggle before he had been able to bring her his pledge. His face, now cool, had been hot with its fevered passion. But she did not know that out of this moment was to be born transforming elements of change destined to shake her life and his; to quake the very mountains themselves; to rend the old order's crust, and finally, after tempest and bloodshed—to bring the light of a new day. No gift of prophecy told her that, of the parentage of this declaration of her love and this declaration of his pledge, was to be born in him a warrior's spirit of crusade which could only reach victory after all the old vindictive furies had been roused to wrath—and conquered—and the shadow of tragedy had touched them both.

And had Bearcat Stacy, holding her soft cheek pressed to his own, been able to look even a little way ahead, he would have gone home and withdrawn the hospitality he had pledged to the guest who slept there.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. **Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.**

SEVERANCE

BY LEIGH GORDON GILTNER

NOT sundered by long leagues of pathless land,
Nor severed by wide wastes of pathless sea;
But ever side by side, and hand in hand,
Yet—worlds apart are we!

An Indiscretion

by H. Ellis Davis

SADIE was on the front seat with Tommy Altman—of course. Grace and Florence were with the other two men in the rear of the big car, and they were all discussing whether or not to do the thing Sadie's husband had told her not to do. Strangely enough, Sadie's was the dissenting voice; but she did not tell the others that Victor had forbidden her, for it was entirely foreign to her code to let her husband's wishes influence her actions—other than to make her coldly defiant.

In the crisp moonlight, on the Arlington road, they had been skimming swiftly along, but Tommy had now slowed the car, so that the rush of air would not carry away his voice, as, half-turning in his seat, he said:

"Let's stop at Crowley's and get a bite to eat."

"And a drink," suggested one of the other men.

"And then come back by the lake road," said Grace, as, beneath the heavy rug, she snuggled closer to her companion's side.

"Oh, don't let's stop." Sadie did not take her eyes from the road ahead.

"Why?" they all chorused in surprise.

"Because I don't want to."

"Don't be selfish," accused Grace; and Florence Effeley, in her thin little voice, whined:

"My feet are cold."

"I must have a drink," declared he of the bibulous tendency, and the other man said:

"Oh, be game, Mrs. Poole. I thought you were good for anything."

"Be a little sport, Sadie," Tommy joined in the protest. Then, in a lower voice, he added: "Vic won't know."

She turned on him.

"Don't be a fool, Tommy."

She knew that he had said it to goad her. Nevertheless, it did goad her, so, after only a moment's hesitation, she added:

"Oh, well, if you are all so bent on it, don't let me stop you." But her eyes narrowed, and she sat, muffled in her furs, looking straight ahead, unheeding Tommy's efforts to draw her into conversation.

For to-night there had been a change. When she had told Victor that Tommy had telephoned and invited her to go for a spin out on the Arlington road, with knit brows he had turned on her.

"All right, girlie; but don't let him stop at Crowley's."

"Why?" she had asked, a little defiantly.

Victor had not answered her, but, seated at the library-table, again busied himself with some papers he was sorting.

"Even if I am late in getting back," she told him spitefully, "you can go down to the club and spend a very pleasant evening."

"Oh, as for that, I can make out." He always shaped his plans to suit hers.

But when, at Tommy's persistent blowing of the automobile-horn out in front, she had come hurriedly down, dressed for the ride, and Victor had taken her into his arms and kissed her, he again warned:

"Sadie, don't stop at Crowley's tonight."

Sharply, a little sternly, he had spoken, and she, disengaging herself, flashed angrily at him, the peculiar charm of her petite French type of beauty heightened to the utmost.

"Oh, I don't reckon I'd see Elenor there."

She had spoken sarcastically, feeling at the time that, in the seeming irrelevancy of her remark, she sounded foolish. But he had broken into his jolly, good-natured laugh.

"Heaven forbid!" But, almost instantly serious again, he added: "Don't stop, though. If you do—well, I can't answer for the consequences."

The laugh was what had touched the quick, his lightly passing over as impossible for his pale, blond married sister that which Sadie might have done without a second thought, the thing against which he had found it necessary to warn her. How Sadie hated Elenor!

Sadie's own people had come from an humbler environment than that in which they now lived. If her father had not acquired wealth, Sadie would perhaps have added to the family income by long hours of service somewhere behind a counter. Fortunately, however, he had made money, big money, in Sadie's early girlhood, and she had been given the advantage of a college education, and from the big house in a fashionable part of the city had been launched rather propitiously into society.

At a semipublic charity ball, her path had crossed that of Victor Poole. The Pooles were one of those old families that moved in an altogether different set, a set that, although its members seemed to mingle at will with her own, yet drew about itself lines that barred invasion.

Tommy Altman had always loved Sadie, and in the ordinary course of events she would have married him. But something in her craved a finer nature, and Victor Poole, Victor, the seemingly unattainable, fitted her ideal of a man. When, at first charmed, then fascinated, he had at last fallen madly in love with her, Sadie had surrendered herself unreservedly, and their marriage had followed swiftly on their betrothal.

Only a few weeks after they were married, while Victor was away on business, Sadie had accepted Tommy's invitation to join him on a little expedition that seemed to her perfectly harmless. It was, therefore, somewhat of a shock when Victor's sister Elenor called on her later, and, in no uncertain terms, expressed her opinion of Sadie's conduct.

Sadie had lost her temper—that temper she at times had such difficulty in controlling—and had quite bluntly told her blue-blooded relative to mind her own business.

Elenor could never do such an ill-bred thing as to lose control of her temper; but quite calmly, though scornfully, with a tongue that bit like acid, she had told Sadie that she was frivolous, irresponsible, and quite unworthy to have married a man like Elenor's brother, who would never be able to trust Sadie; that Sadie had been reared in a different environment from the Pooles, and that Victor would do well to wash his hands of her entirely; in fact, that it might be the most satisfactory arrangement for all if he would just pension her and let her go her way.

This last had seemed to Sadie doubly cruel, as her father, through speculation, had recently lost his fortune, and her own family was now again so miserably poor. All the rebellious pride in her had risen at that sarcastic, withering, and, to her, unjust assault. The Pooles, then, were ashamed of her. Even Victor, although he loved her—and she never doubted his love—was perhaps also ashamed of her.

Victor, though, was always considerately sweet and loving, with an amused chuckle or tolerant smile at her caprices. When, a little fearfully, she had told him of her trip with Tommy—she did not refer to the scene that had followed—he had said that

it was perfectly all right—if she had felt like doing it. When they had their disagreements, as all lovers do, it was not over things of that kind.

However, the dread remained. Beneath that well-bred composure of his, Victor might be ashamed of her. Coolly, calculating, by defiant association with Tommy Altman and some of his fast friends, she had set to work to goad him into showing it. The uncertainty was unbearable. She must know. She wanted an outburst, which would give her an opportunity to bring matters to a focus. If he really was, she wanted him, by some word or deed, to give her a chance to accuse him of being ashamed of her, and, then and there, to establish her status.

All her subtle efforts to trap him had failed, and she had settled into the peculiarly unhappy state of living, with a husband whom she idolized, who, she knew, loved her devotedly, but who was perhaps ashamed of her, and sorry that he had followed the dictates of his heart and married her. So she remained coldly defiant to any suggestions he made as to her continued relations with certain members of her old set, with the only satisfaction that she knew it made the fair Elenor wring her hands in helpless rage.

As they moved swiftly down the moonlit road, Sadie sat morosely brooding. She was startled from her preoccupation only when Tommy swung the car from the highway to enter the grounds of the rather pretentious "hotel," a place with a list of unsavory scandals and one or two tragedies to its credit.

Instinctively, she put out a detaining hand to check his purpose, but recovered herself before he had noticed the gesture. The little scene with Victor was still vividly in her mind. She had refused him a parting kiss, and had left him with that baffled, hurt expression in his eyes that she had noticed several times recently. And certain reactionary emotions had begun to take place within her. Had she not been self-centered and unjust to Victor? If he had his ideals, his traditions, should she not have made herself familiar with them and have respected them, as he had hers? He had been so good to her, so loyal, so broad, and what had been her return? Persistently she had flown into the face of conventions. Now, with a shiver, she began to realize that if anything had happened to throw her into a bad light, she had no foundation for readjustment other than his blind, faithful love, which, she felt, must give way before the weight of logic.

And suddenly it occurred to her how badly it would look for her to go to a place like Crowley's with Tommy Altman. For Tommy, although married, held very lightly his bonds to the frivolous society girl who was his wife, and already members of Sadie's old set, with a smile and a significant shrug, had begun to connect Sadie's and Tommy's names. To-night was the first time Victor had positively forbidden her to do a thing, and she was about to defy him. That frightened her a little.

Swinging widely about the main entrance, Tommy rounded the wing where guest-rooms were. In these had occurred the tragedies that had set ablaze the yellow journals of the city. At a small, obscure entrance he stopped the car, and they alighted.

"We'll go in here," he said, laughing a little nervously, and glancing about him as if apprehensive of being seen by some one.

As they entered a short cross-hall, Sadie and Tommie in advance of the others, a man turned a corner ahead and came rapidly toward them. It proved to be Morgan Porter, a lawyer, whose office was in the same building as Victor's, and Sadie instinctively tried to shrink behind Tommy. As he reached them, Porter slowed his steps, raised his hat, and, looking Tommy squarely in the face, said:

"Good evening. How are you, Altman?" and passed on out of the door through which they had just come.

Grumbling curses, Tommy pushed on, and they entered a small, private dining-room, where he rang for a waiter. As they seated themselves at the table, one of the other men glanced significantly at him and smiled. Tommy, his weak face flushed, sank into a gloomy silence.

To Sadie, the wait to be served seemed interminable. In silence she sat beside the

morose Tommy, heedless of the incessant chatter of the others. Presently, her hand on Tommy's sleeve to call his attention, in a low voice, she asked:

"Tommy, can't—can't you make that man hurry?"

He glanced keenly at her, looked away, cleared his throat as if to say something, looked at her again, then began vigorously and persistently pushing the bell. When their waiter appeared, he told him:

"Have my order cut out. Bring us some sandwiches, five cocktails, and a Scotch straight. And hop lightly!" He spun a dollar out on the table in front of him. "You get another if you bring those things in five minutes."

Heedless of the surprised gasps of the others, Tommy sat with his elbows on the table, chin resting on his clasped hands, apparently wrapped in thought.

When they were leaving, and had swung once more into the road, at Florence's plaintive query, "O, Tommy, aren't you going back by the lake?" he only snapped over his shoulder: "No!"

And Sadie was grateful; for, although by the way they were returning the distance to town was more than twenty miles, it was fifteen miles farther around by the lake. But it seemed to her that the car had never gone so slowly. At a snail's pace the miles seemed to drag beneath them. A nervous haste to get home to Victor, to confess, to have it over with, made her impatient. Leaning toward Tommy, she asked him: "Couldn't we go faster?" and the big car leaped ahead.

These expeditions with members of her old set had recently begun to pall on Sadie. The unrestrained talk and conduct was growing disgusting to her. Now, she glanced over her shoulder at those behind —other men's wives with other women's husbands—and her lips curled scornfully. Intensely she was regretting having agreed with them to stop at Crowley's to-night, and in her restiveness she again urged Tommy to increase their speed.

With the rush of wind in her ears, the chatter of those behind was completely drowned; while, Tommy, silent, crouched over the wheel, his eyes on the road ahead.

Suddenly, as they veered around a long curve, with a report like a rifle-shot, a tire burst. There was a lurching swing of the rear end of the automobile, a crunching, splintering, metallic rattle, as Tommy reversed his engine, and the big car, by a miracle having missed capsizing and a collision with a tree by a space of ten feet yet to go, came to a stop.

The smash was so sudden, over so quickly, that the party were thrown into a sort of daze, rather than hysterically excited. With the exception of Tommy, who was braced by the wheel, they were all flung forward to the bottom of the car, and those behind were piled in an indiscriminate mass.

Pulling Sadie back on to the seat, Tommy calmly slipped off a pair of goggles which he had taken from his pocket and put on when they had increased their speed; then, with his inconsequent, whimsical smile, he turned to her.

"Well, I reckon this is where we stay. I've peeled off every cog."

"What!" she exclaimed in sudden alarm, "we can't go on?" She opened the door and began hastily climbing out. Tommy followed her.

The others took the accident complacently.

"Some of the other cars will soon be along," said Grace. "I bid for a seat in the first one."

"Not much they will," replied Tommy. "Folks don't come back this road. They go around by the lake; and it's too late for anybody else to be coming out from town; so I reckon here's where we camp out. It's twenty miles to town, and six miles back to Crowley's. Anybody volunteer to go back? I don't." Unruffled, he sat down on the running-board.

"We—we will have to do something." Nervously, Sadie twisted her hands together. "We can't stay here. Can't we telephone from somewhere?"

"Oh, don't get excited, Sadie," Florence chided her. "What have we to complain about? We have good company, good soft cushions to sit on, plenty of nice, heavy rugs to keep us warm. And we'll be rescued in the end, never fear. I call this

quite an adventure. It's not as if it was our own doing, you know." She snuggled contentedly beneath the rugs and hugged her companion's arm.

But Tommy, after a glance at Sadie, rose to his feet, his face once more serious.

"I believe there's a telephone at old man Goodman's, two miles farther on. I'll go there and phone for a car to come out and get us."

"Oh, let's do," said Sadie gratefully, and she joined him as he started off. But he stopped and turned to face her.

"Now, Sadie, there's no use in your going. You stay here with the others. You'll just get all tired out for nothing." Gently he took her arm to lead her back to the car; but she impatiently brushed his hand away.

"No; I'm going with you. And let's hurry." Dainty, exquisite in her handsome motoring-togs, she trudged bravely off beside him.

"Bet we don't see you two again to-night," called Florence audaciously.

Amid the yapping of curs, they crossed the yard surrounding the Goodmans' rambling country house, which was set back from the road among shadows of large trees, and they had to pound several times on the door before the old man finally opened it a tiny crack and peered out at them over a small kerosene lamp he held in his hand.

"Well, what do you want?" he asked, none too amiably.

"My telephone ain't workin'," he announced when they had stated their errand, and he started to close the door in their faces.

"Hold on," said Tommy, arresting the door with an outstretched hand. "Haven't you a horse?"

"My horse is lame, and I don't care about havin' him driv'."

"Oh, I'll buy the damned horse!" Tommy replied irritably. "Just you hurry and get him out. I'll have to drive him, lame or no lame."

"He ain't fer sale," snapped their only hope of succor. This time he succeeded in getting the door shut, and they heard the latch slide into place.

"Of all the contrary old skunks!" said Tommy, as they again reached the road. "But these natives don't seem to have much sympathy for us joy-riders. Seem to have a sort of contempt for us. Ever notice it? Well, I guess it means to camp out, after all."

Sadie stopped there in the road and faced him.

"Tommy," she said, nervously drawing her coat closer about her, "I'm going on."

"Good Lord!" Tommy cried in consternation. "You mean walk? That's out of the question. Why, it's nearly twenty miles."

"I can't help it. I must go on."

"But you'll give out! Even if you could walk it, you wouldn't reach town to-night."

"I—I can't help it," she replied, a little desperately. Turning, she started off.

Tommy fell into step beside her; but again she stopped and faced him.

"No; you go back—back there with the others."

"Damn the others!"

"You—you must. This is bad enough as it is. I—I want you to go back. I want to go on alone."

Then he caught her meaning, and, his weak, boyish face strangely tense, his cap in his hand, he stood there in the road, silently looking after her as she turned and left him.

Mile after mile she trudged along, an incongruous little figure on the deserted road, clad in smart motoring-clothes. The half-moon, sinking below the tree-tops behind her, cast queer, wavering shadows in front. And as weariness began to sap her strength and nerve force, her perturbations increased, her thoughts became a little wild.

Why, she began to reflect, instead of being merely ashamed of her, should Victor not be completely disgusted? The result of this escapade was enough to disgust a man like Victor. To-night, too, she had sensed the turning of the worm. Her persistent, cruel goadings, then, had at last brought results. But instead of the malignant satisfaction she had thought she would have at forcing him from cover, there had come this new terror to clutch her and fill her with an apprehensive dread. Nervously, she

brushed back a white motoring-veil which was about her hair. Then, unwinding it, she crushed it in her hand and tossed it aside.

One hope she desperately hugged to her breast, trying to draw from it a little warmth of comfort. Until she had told him, Victor would not know that she had stopped at Crowley's.

But suddenly her breath caught sharply. Suppose Victor had seen Morgan Porter. Morgan was a member of Victor's club, and had, as likely as not, seen him if he went there when he reached town. What would be more natural than that he should mention to her husband that he had seen her? Victor, then, perhaps thought that she was still at Crowley's.

In a fresh panic she quickened her steps. She forgot how tired she was. On, on, down that endless stretch of road she hurried. Her long cloak interfered with her stride, and, with hardly a thought of what she was doing, she took it off and threw it out to one side of the road. She must reach Victor as soon as possible. She must get to him. She must beg him to believe in her. She must get on her knees before him and swear to him that she had been the victim of circumstances.

She began to run, and, as she ran, she dropped from her the heavy muff and other furs. The low, high-heeled shoes jarred her body at every step. A sharp catch came into her side and stayed there. But she ran on; ran until her breath came only in labored sobs, until the world began to swim dizzily about her; until, by exhaustion, she was forced once more into a walk.

Her shoes were beginning to wear loose on her feet, so that she stumbled constantly. Finally, when her ankle turned, and she fell forward to her hands and knees, before rising, she unfastened them and took them off. But the gravel on the hard road so cruelly hurt the little feet in their thin silk stockings that she sought the turf at its side.

The moon sank slowly out of sight, leaving the world in a kind of crystalline darkness, jeweled with the myriads upon myriads of stars. Slowly, blindly now, she struggled on, in one hand carrying her shoes, the other pressed tightly against her throbbing side. She had lost all sense of time. She seemed to be in a kind of hell in which she was struggling—against pain, against the exhaustion that was creeping on her, though she fought it as one might fight the death-sleep.

Mumbled half aloud at times, at others, drilling through her numbed brain without words, kept repeating the monotonous prayer:

"O God! Just let me get to him. Please—please, God, help me to reach him. O God! Just let me—"

To her flagging senses came the rumble of a wagon. From a side road it was turning, ahead of her, into the highway.

With a desperate effort she pulled herself together and quickened her pace. Limping forward at a half-run, her breath coming in gasps, the shooting pain in her side wrenching her body, she was about to overtake the wagon, when, at a place where the road began gently to descend, the heavy, plodding horses broke into a trot.

It had seemed to her that, already, she had reached a point where she could get no more from her physical efforts than the stumbling pace at which she was proceeding, and she experienced a vague surprise, when, as the God-sent chance of a lift in the wagon began slipping away, her numb feet responded to the dictates of her brain, and she ran, ran swiftly.

The surface of the road here was broken, so that, in places, sharp-cornered pieces of dirt stuck up, cruelly cutting her feet; but she scarcely noticed the pain. Spasmodically, as she could gather the breath, she screamed: "Stop—stop—stop!" But, by all the uproar of an empty wagon on a hard road, her voice was drowned, and, gradually, she was being left behind.

Suddenly, though, at the bottom of the hill, the wagon ran into a pocket of sand, perhaps washed over the road in some recent freshet, and, with the deadening of the rumble, the *chink, chink, chink* of the traces was the only sound. And it was then that one of her wild appeals: "Stop!" rang out into the night.

The driver looked around; then, with a loud "Wo-ah!" reined in his team.

"What the Sam Hill?" he wanted to know, as she reached the front of the wagon. Nevertheless, although she made no reply, he held out an obliging hand and helped her to scramble in over the wheel. He was an old farmer on an early start to the city for supplies. He had a stubbly beard, and wore a soft felt hat that flopped down over one eye.

As she took her place on the seat beside him, and he clucked up his horses, the world suddenly reeled about her, and she grasped his sleeve to keep from pitching forward. Passing an arm about her shoulders, he grasped her arm on the other side of her body, thus steadying her.

"Po' little gal," he said, speaking without removing a short pipe he held clamped in his teeth, "you're all petered, ain't yer? What I'd like to know, though, is what you're doin' out on the road this time o' night—or mornin', ruther. Some er them young jackanapes took yer out and tried to mistreat yer, I reckon, an' yer left 'im. I wished I was yo' pa fer about ten minutes, an' had 'im in front of me, and a good cowhide in my hand. I'd cut 'im a lick fer every step yer took."

Thus he mumbled on. Now and then he asked her a question, paused for the answer that did not come, then continued his monologue. Silent, scarcely realizing what he was saying, she crouched against him.

Suddenly, across the heavens, shot a great shaft of light. Then, around a bend in the road ahead, swung an automobile. The muffler was cut out, and, at a terrific speed, it roared toward them.

"Tarnation!" exclaimed the old farmer, as the blinding light struck full in their faces. Quickly he drew his team to one side of the road and halted them, while, with almost incredible swiftness, the car came on, a roadster, its lone occupant crouched low over the wheel, and roared by, on into the night.

The old man soothed his dancing team.

"Them dam' fools ought all to break their necks!" he grumbled as he pulled the horses again into the road.

The pain in Sadie's side returned, and the constant jolting of the wagon made it one continuous agony. And, with the reawakening of her senses, the torturing thoughts came back. Alternately formulating words, methods of defense, then, in despair, giving up all hope that there was any defense she could make that her husband would believe, she huddled beside the now silent old man. The pain in her side grew so intense that she had to clench her teeth to keep from crying aloud in her agony. But at last, turning from the highway, they took a short cut on a strip of wooded, sandy road, and here, except for an occasional jolt, the riding was easier.

Just as dawn was beginning to gray the world and dim the lights of the city, they drew up at Oak Street. The old farmer wanted to turn in and drive to her door, but she would not let him.

"No;" she told him, "it's only half a block, and I—I'd rather walk."

When they stopped she had bent and tried to put on her shoes; but her feet were so swollen that she found it impossible. So she threw off the folded tarpaulin he had put about her to shut off the keen air, and, carrying her shoes in her hand, climbed down over the wheel. When she had reached the ground she lifted her face, as, with the back of her hand she brushed the hair up from her eyes.

"I can never thank you enough—I can never tell you—" she began, but, leaning above her, the gruff old man cut her short.

"Ef you ever want to tell me his name, I'll fix 'im. I'll spread tacks in the road and blow up his tires; then I'll sick the dogs on him. I'll beat his head off with a whip-stock. I'll—" but she had already turned away; and the words were drowned, as, giving a jerk to the lines, he once more started his wagon.

On the other side of the street a policeman was pacing, and Sadie shrank into a shadowed place until his back was turned, then scuttled on to her door.

In the hall, she paused, listening. Everything was silent, with the dead silence of a sleeping house late at night, and suddenly she clutched at a wild hope:

Perhaps, after all, Victor suspected nothing, had not waited up for her. In that case she would have time to gain a calmer mood—and to improve her appearance,

For her hair was disheveled and half tumbled down, her dainty dress was torn and disarranged, she could feel the grit from the dirty tarpaulin on her damp shoulders, her skirt was wet to her knees and soiled with the dust of the road.

"Yes—yes," she thought desperately, "by all means I must improve my appearance before I face Victor."

Silently, she crept up to her room, paused again to listen, entered, closed the door, locked it, then switched on the lights.

Just as she was turning from the button on the wall a door on the opposite side of the room was flung open, and her husband strode in.

His heavy black hair was tumbled about, as though it had been run through many times with nervous fingers. The usual healthy color was gone from his face, until it seemed a dull, ashen gray. About his mouth the lines were deep and drawn.

Only one glance she gave at his face, at the look that gathered there as his eyes rested on her. Then, with her hands flung appealingly out, while the shoes dropped from her nerveless fingers, she threw herself, face downward, at his feet.

Without a word he stooped and half-lifted her. Then, with an exclamation, he put her down, dropped to his knees beside her, took wonderingly into his hand a poor little bruised foot, and tore away the remnant of stocking. Lifting the edge of her skirt, he drew out the other little foot. From this one the silk stocking had entirely worn. Blood started from a jagged cut and wet the palm of his hand. Sinking to the floor, he gathered the fagged, limp little body close into his arms.

"Sadie, my baby, my poor little darling!" he cried. "What has happened to you? Why are you—why are your feet like this?"

Under his tenderness her body stiffened. Spasmodically, she gripped his coat and raised herself.

"I—I had to come to you, Victor. I knew that you could not trust me; that you could have no faith in me." A dry sob caught her voice.

"But your feet?"

"My—my shoes were coming to pieces. I could not walk in them. I had to take my shoes off."

"My God!"

"I—I am so frivolous, so irresponsible, so unreliable—" unconsciously she was repeating the verdict of his sister, Elenor, which had rung constantly through her thoughts that night. "But I—I had to come to you, I wanted to tell you, I had to let you know that I was not still out there—there at that place. I—"

"Hush, Sadie!" he interrupted her sharply.

But, as though at the mention of the road-house, the tender expression left his face, and, again, it was lined and careworn. Taking her hands loose from where they gripped his coat, he gathered her up and carried her to a lounge, then he turned to pace the floor.

Dumbly her eyes followed him. In his own eyes there was compassion, pity for her. But his lips were grimly set. His momentary tenderness, she felt, had been due to his shock at her collapse; but he had again mastered himself, and now, at the end, he would not hesitate. Raising herself on one elbow, she pleaded:

"I know you—you said that if—if I stopped there you would not answer for the consequences. And I did stop there!" she almost screamed it at him. "But—but, Victor, we left almost immediately, and the—the car was wrecked, and—and I came to let you know. I came to you as soon as I could. I—"

With a gesture he interrupted her.

"I know—I know all that. You were so late—I feared an accident—I went to look for you." She remembered the automobile that had torn by her on the road. "Those fools told me you had come on. But I could not find you. I have been almost crazy!"

"But—but the consequences, Victor. You said that if—if—" She stopped, unable to go on. Her wide eyes were on his face. She was trying to read what was there.

He came to sink heavily into a chair by the lounge. Longing tenderness was in his eyes, but the grimness about his mouth had deepened.

"The consequences, the consequences? God knows I have done what I could. But my hands are tied, now." He paused and cleared his throat, as if it was hard for him to go on. Lips parted, scarcely breathing, she waited. He continued:

"Minnie Altman made a threat to sue for divorce the next time her husband went to Crowley's with a woman—and name that woman as corespondent, with all the traditions of that place to back up her claim." Sadie's breath caught sharply, and she carried her hand to her throat, as if trying to loosen something there. "Morgan Porter is her lawyer. He saw you there to-night, and will begin action to-morrow. I saw him at the club, and he told me so."

As his voice, in its measured cadence, driving, as it seemed to her, blow upon blow, ceased, with clenched hands over her face, she sank back on the cushions.

And, as she lay there with her face hidden, quivering in the supreme anguish of a woman shamed, it seemed as if the proud Elenor came and stood before her. Then came trooping the other Pooles, proud, aristocratic, hedging about her husband, shutting him away from her. Like the call of a bugle in a vast, empty hall, there rang through her senses the words that Elenor had hurled at her, as Victor's duty to himself and to his family: "He should pension you and let you go your way."

The wild delirium of hysteria was fast taking possession of her, and she found it more and more difficult to resist the desire to scream, to tear her hair, to bruise her hands, her face.

Then Victor rose to his feet—so suddenly that the chair in which he had been sitting fell over with a crash. Bending above her, he snatched her hands from her quivering face.

"But let them do their damnedest! It's hard for you, baby-girl; mighty hard! But we'll be facing the music together. We've got each other; so what else matters? Forget 'em!

"And now," he continued, his voice softened, and his face as tender as a woman's, "I must doctor those poor little bleeding feet."

The hard, strained look of haunting terror in Sadie's eyes gave way to the comfort of gathering tears.

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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

BY WILL THOMAS WITHROW

IN order to enjoy a meal
(The sort once known as "square,")
One needs a block of U. S. Steel,
So that he need not care
A whoop for the outrageous rate
The food-sharks charge for food,
But can afford to fill his plate
With everything that's good;

BUT

If one happens not to own
A block of U. S. Steel,
He's lucky if he gets a bone
To gnaw, of beef or veal;
The situation is indeed
With gravest peril fraught;
Unless things change, our only feed
Soon will be "Food for Thought!"

Proteus Passes

by Frank Blighton

Author of "Haunted Hands," "The Speedmaster," "Mr. South of Somewhere," etc.

CHAPTER I.

THE MAN AT THE DESK.

STIFLING the sound of his respiration by a quivering hand pressed close over his nose and mouth, the man peered eagerly into the open window of the room. It was a peculiarly chilling and vaultlike apartment, with its high ceiling and frowning walls paneled in some wood so dark as to appear black.

Toward the farther end of the room, at some little distance from the window through which the watcher gazed, sat another man at a large, flat-topped desk.

His back was to the watcher and at first glance he presented a rather curious spectacle, owing to the dimness of the light, provided chiefly by a dim chandelier close to the ceiling, and by a shaded reading-lamp on the desk before him.

In the tricky illumination it seemed to the watcher as if the man's head was poised in the air; the illusion only being intermittently dispelled when, from time to time, the individual at the desk shifted his position slightly.

He was obviously reading.

Presently, as his eyes became more accustomed to the quality of the light within the apartment, the watcher saw that the man at the desk was attired in a long, flowing black silk garment, the back of which was tucked at the waist in a manner that, somehow, seemed to suggest the panels of the room, done in miniature.

As he continued to silently scrutinize the gloomy chamber and its sole occupant, some tenuous, wraithlike wisps of winter fog sucked swiftly and furtively through the open window and vanished within the room, like souls obliterated at the wanton behest of some noxious deity.

To Joseph Bradish, the watcher, the intentness with which the man at the desk perused the documents before him continued undisturbed—with one exception.

That was when a low, muted sound surged into the chamber from the farther end of the place, to be blotted out even before the man at the desk lifted his silvered head, and stared at the corner of the room, clustered about so thickly with shadows that Bradish could discover nothing there save a fine, perpendicular white line.

Bradish at first had been able to make nothing of this, but now he judged that it must be the crack between the folding doors, through which entrance to the room was made from the interior of the building.

With a composure that Bradish envied, the occupant of the room quickly resumed his former occupation; and Bradish, after vainly trying to pierce the damp fog enveloping him, silently commenced to force the open window-sash still higher.

From his observations during daylight, Bradish knew he was in comparatively little danger of discovery from the rear. In the first place, this window opened on an L-like part of the alley, where the wall jutted sharply inward, affording him scant space to stand on a box and look within; in the next, the alley itself terminated in a blank wall at one end, and at the other the opening leading to the main thoroughfare was efficiently barred by a pair of decrepit iron gates—a memento of the days when the building which formed the opposite side of the passageway was an opera-house.

The window and its frame were comparatively new, balanced with exquisite nicety and operated as noiselessly as if the whole was immersed in oil. Soon, with even less difficulty than he had apprehended, the opening was ample to admit of Bradish stepping from his box into the room. After which, with the deliberateness of one who has weighed all costs and for whom no hazard whatever is too desperate to be incurred, Bradish lowered the sash to the same small opening which he had found when arriving there, some ten minutes before.

His taut nerves relaxed with this effort. The previous quivering of his body, his heightened heart-beats, his increased and shortened breathing, all were gone.

They were replaced by a peculiar calmness and a certitude which acute danger often breeds in a desperate man, who has calculated and is prepared for any alternative which may arise in case he fails.

In one way it was not unlike the lack of fear which envelops a line of charging men, surging forward against a concealed enemy, who has every advantage of position and weapons.

The men in the charging line are under no illusions; they know, full well, that death unseen swirls through the air about them; yet they are intent only upon their object. It is the hypnosis of the inevitable. If they live they live. If they die they die. The choice is fate's.

Lacking only the *élan* common to companionship under such conditions, Joseph Bradish experienced all the other emotions.

For the man at the desk with his unsuspecting attitude was his enemy.

Likewise, every advantage which centuries of civilization could breed in the minds of the majority of mankind lay with his enemy.

Bradish, who had dropped to his hands and knees on entering, now scanned the apartment. It offered scant promise for concealment of either himself or the black bag which he carried.

The intruder clutched the bag as if it were an integral part of himself, as he crouched below the level of the window and made ready for his next move.

Only the rustling of the parchment in the hands of the absorbed reader at the far end of the room broke the tense silence, as Bradish began crawling, as silent as a rabbit padding across a grassy lawn, toward one of the huge, high-backed leather chairs, standing primly between the windows along the walls. Pushing one of them on its rollers a little further from the wall, Bradish ensconced himself behind it, with his black bag. The bag blended into the dark panels and was blotted out.

From where he had located himself, Bradish was now within ten feet of the man at the desk, whose absorption continued unruffled. He was in plainer view now from the space between the back and the cushioned seat of the chair.

Only the gleam of the intruder's corrosive eyes would have revealed his presence, had the other casually looked in his direction. Deftly Bradish opened the bag. He reached within and when he withdrew his hand, a metallic gleam shimmered for an instant, between the legs of the chair, as if seeking to heliograph a warning to the hem of the silken robe where it swept the floor, at the feet of the reader.

Then came a knock on the door.

The man at the desk raised his head.

"Come in," he said.

With the words the fine, perpendicular white line which Bradish had previously noticed broadened magically at the farther side of the room from which he was hiding, transforming itself into a great oblong of light, framing a heavy-set, coarse-featured man in a blue uniform, who was standing in the center of it.

Simultaneously, the gleaming object in Bradish's hand disappeared into the orifice of the black bag by his side.

CHAPTER II.

THE JURY HAS AGREED.

"WHAT is it?" inquired the man at the desk.

He did not raise his head, apparently, and to the superalert Bradish there was a hint of carefully repressed irritation in the words.

The smoldering eyes of the concealed watcher transferred their line of vision to the face of the court officer in the door.

He wondered whether it was the play of lights on the fellow's features which gave the impression of a passing feral expression; yet the voice was respectful as the attendant replied:

"The jury has reached a verdict, your honor."

"So?" responded the judge pleasantly, smoothing the document that he had been reading with a white and delicately manicured hand, but making no move to rise, as the other evidently expected he would.

"The jury has reached its verdict, has it, Ward?" he continued, repeating the other's words in a stealthy purr that gave Bradish a feeling that they were tinctured with something more than the cold austerity of an impartial man. "What do you conceive the verdict to be, Officer Ward?" he continued. "Is it one which will be pleasing to those most interested?" he concluded with more geniality.

"The evidence would seem to admit of only one possible verdict," replied the attendant stolidly. "It will be guilty, of course."

"Ah! Of course!" parroted the judge, patting the document before him in the same fashion as previously. "Announce that I shall be prepared to hear the verdict —shortly," he finished, dropping his eyes to the papers in front of him again.

Once more the fine, perpendicular white line made its appearance in the far corner of the chamber, and a profound silence brooded over it.

Down the alley, through the orifice barred by the decrepit gates, filtered the cry of a newsboy, followed in quick succession by a rollicking street piano tune, the howl of a child and the raucous shriek of an auto-horn.

None of these sounds seemed to produce the slightest impression on the man at the desk, who ultimately became so engrossed in his reading that Bradish, watching from behind the chair, felt his former illusion grip him and began to fancy that the judge's head was again poised in mid-air bodilessly when the judge's desk-telephone rang, shattering the stillness with a dynamic quality that almost threw Bradish off his balance.

"No, not yet," said the judge softly, inclining his head at the black mouth of the transmitter, as though it were capable of transferring the studied courtesy which he was evidently trying to convey to his hearer by the tone of his voice. "The jury is waiting for me now. How long? Twenty years? Why, that's the extreme penalty."

Bradish felt the blood drain from his brain.

He was suddenly faint and weak, despite his effort at self-control.

The reaction caused his head to fall sharply back against the wall behind him. The slight sound of the contact fortunately was muffled by his thatch of hair and, as the judge was again speaking, the sound was lost.

The violence of the shock, however, restored his shaken wits.

Again, just as the judge was bidding his auditor a pleasant good night, Bradish's hand stole toward the opening of the black bag by his side.

The judge replaced the receiver on the hook and very deliberately pushed it back across the desk, reaching, coordinately, again for the document which he had been reading.

Officer Ward, having closed the door to the chambers of the Hon. Archibald Watson, stepped briskly down the short private hall leading to the other door which afforded egress into the rear of the large court-room, and a quick access to the bench a few feet beyond.

As he entered the large room, Ward stepped over to the court clerk, whispered a word, then stepped outside to the corridor paralelling the court-room on the far side from the judge's chambers.

Another court attendant was on guard at a door, through the transom of which poured a dense cloud of cigar smoke. Ward went directly to this man, saying:

"You'll have to wait a few minutes, Jerry. The judge'll be out shortly."

"How long is that?" demanded the bailiff in Celtic fashion,

" He said ' shortly,' " replied Ward, turning to reenter the court-room.

The bailiff in turn opened the door to the room where the trial-jury had been deliberating, popped in his head, conveyed the same information to the foreman sitting nearest the door, popped back, closed and relocked the door.

Ward, meantime, passed through the court-room to the main hall, where a throng of spectators, unusually large for the hour, were pacing back and forth along the tesselated floor. Several reporters asked him if the rumor that the jury had agreed was true. Ward nodded, without pausing. He reentered another door almost directly opposite the main entrance to the court-room, marked " Private," and closed it with care behind him.

A dour-faced man in a chair, smoking, looked up as he came in.

" Well, O'Malley," said Ward, dropping his mask of taciturnity, " I rapped his honor, and he'll be out shortly."

A slight nod was the only reply. " Smut " O'Malley, lieutenant in all matters political for " Cozy Corner " Mike Cochran, possessed a countenance with all of the yielding, plushlike qualities of a Belgian block, a loquacity that would make the sphinx appear garrulous.

He rose, threw away the stump of his cigar, and followed Ward into the now deserted hall. As the court attendant hurried back to his post Smut dropped unobserved into one of the rear seats and watched the drama being enacted within the rail before the still vacant bar of justice.

The reporters were at their table, likewise Deputy District Attorney Fielding, with a plain-clothes man attached to his office, and a clerk.

Opposite them sat Byron Bartnett, counsel for the defendant, a massive man with iron-gray hair, deep but piercing gray eyes, a Napoleonic nose curving over thinly compressed lips above his pugnacious chin. He turned to watch his client being led into the enclosure toward a chair by his side.

The judge, the jury and the prisoner are the three elements absolutely essential to the staging of a verdict. If one is missing, the performance of " administering justice " cannot go on.

Two were still missing.

Officer Ward, only detailed for duty on his honor; Archibald Watson, since this case had begun, although familiar enough with such scenes, saw the spectators wedging into place and fighting for positions of vantage, with a most ironic smile before he again entered the corridor leading to the chambers of the trial judge.

They settled themselves with an unmistakable ripple of eagerness, just as the prisoner, escorted by a matron and a burly court attendant, entered and took her seat by her counsel.

Of slightly over medium height, with a slender, sinuous figure, alluring in its lines of approaching young womanhood; delicately full crimson lips; violet eyes, with just a touch of the velvety blackness of the Orient in their misty depths, and a profusion of red-gold hair waving rebelliously over her ears, Marion Poole had none of the vapid weakness of demeanor visible in most merely pretty girls in the presence of tragedy.

Nevertheless, she was too utterly human to be able to eliminate all appearance of entreaty from her mien as she saw the sea of faces, whose eyes were focused on her.

She searched in vain for the sight of one face which, heretofore, had always been in one place—the front row of spectators, on the left of the middle aisle—the face of Joseph Bradish, who, until this moment surcharged with suspense and uncertainty, had always met her yearning, desperate eyes with a look of devotion and undying belief in her absolute innocence of the charge of " assault with intent to murder," on which the jury was about to render its verdict.

It seemed so long ago to Marion Poole since she had first met Joseph Bradish—so very long ago. Then the music of hope had blown in the April breezes, when she had taken a group of tenement children into the country for a spring-time outing, a thing without precedent in their otherwise drab, stained childhood.

There had been mysterious murmurs in the budding trees, a kiss in the damp air

like the dewy mouth of a young girl receiving and bestowing the pledge of her love to her betrothed. White flowers were opening their petals to the sun, as if striving to enfold the whole world in their diminutive fragrance.

It had been a transcendent day.

And now life seemed to hold parley with death in the somnolent surcharged expectancy of the ringed face of spectators—like the faces of a crowd at the Circus Maximus on an ancient Roman holiday, awaiting the tragedy on the white sands of the arena.

On that far-off day Life had been a *Circe*, who looked so fair that, to her now galloping senses, it had been all gaiety, all sunshine, all glory-drenched, with the consciousness of her settlement work and its progress.

It was on that day that Joseph Bradish first asked her to be his wife. The very sunbeams had seemed to sing to him—how well Marion remembered his face—as he proposed.

And she had refused him!

Not for any reason which the average girl of her age and antecedents would have found a barrier to their union; for Joe was young, ambitious, clean, wonderfully talented, more than prepossessing of face and figure—but because he had been an actor!

An actor!

How the grim irony of her own reply now reverberated in her ears as she sat down beside Byron Bartnett.

She was herself an actor now.

Only this was no mimic world in which she was appearing for the edification or the amusement of that circle of avid spectators. Realism, robbed of all allusion, was rampant in the steel cage from which she had just emerged; gross, vulgar, hideous companions had been her portion for the past month, for she had been committed to prison in default of fifty thousand dollars' bail, following her indictment on the charge of "assault to murder one Michael Cochran" at a time and place of a character so horrifying that to think of it was to swoon again.

Even the newspapers had not spared her.

One, in particular, the *Sentinel*, had featured her shame, and printed her picture with a drawing of the place where the trouble had occurred, in a page story. In that account every sickening detail was so touched up and all mitigating circumstances, even the spirit of truth itself, so shamelessly obliterated, that Marion Poole's resentment flared up anew as she glanced over at the reporter's table and saw the cynical-lipped author of the article, as he plumed himself, sitting snugly in the circle of other newspapermen.

The other papers, true, had not reprinted the story with anything like the amount of space or detail that the *Sentinel* had shown, but this Marion well knew was not out of any especial consideration for her; rather, it was due to that curious thing known as "newspaper ethics" which restrains one journal from allowing a competitor to crow over it by enlarging upon a "feature story" which its rival has first published.

In her settlement work Marion Poole had come to know life, stripped of its glamour. So long as her efforts and the small but tidy income which she received from trust funds was devoted to merely alleviating acute cases of poverty, distress among children or other of the effects of the ulcers on the body politic, so long as she was accorded a measure of respect and gratitude among those to whom she ministered, and there was no wanton interference upon the part of the higher-ups, whom, later on, her activities had offended.

It was only after she had refused Joe Bradish the third time—only after she had met Cozy Corner Mike Cochran in person—that her feet had strayed into the cunning snare that had brought her to this pass. Even when the net had been thrown over her, Marion Poole had been scarcely able to comprehend what it signified. The first scenes of her tragedy had come before senses so stunned as to refuse to credit what had happened.

Not until Ike Black, the thin-lipped, cynical-faced reporter for the *Sentinel* had somehow obtained access to her cell in the woman's prison and Marion had eagerly poured out her story to him, after which Black had written the frightful excoriation of her, could she believe the stygian, galling truth.

And now Ike Black was cynically leering at her from his seat at the reporter's table, beyond which was the door through which Court Officer Ward had just gone to summon the judge the second time.

Marion turned to her counsel.

His face was grave with a shadow which, until now, she had not seen upon his Napoleonic countenance.

She started to speak to him.

He frowned slightly, nodding in the direction of the doorway leading into the corridor on the other side of the room.

The girl turned her misty, violet eyes to gaze in that direction.

The jury was filing in.

CHAPTER III.

COZY CORNER MIKE'S FRAME-UP.

MARION POOLE, with the unstudied impulse of one in her desperate plight, blotted out the supernumeraries of the drama in which she was at once a spectator and a principal, in her contemplation of the file of twelve men shuffling toward the jury-box.

With them lay her fate.

Her first glance was at the foreman. What she divined made her more than apprehensive. The foreman was a lean, cadaverous individual, with mediocrity written from the tip of his lantern jaw to the wave of his thirteen sparse, sandy hairs, combed over his bony precipice of a forehead with a unique, eolian-harp effect.

His oblique gaze toward her was as remorseless as the relentless, barbed summing up of Assistant District Attorney Fielding.

It had seemed to Marion during Fielding's speech that the law was a most incomprehensible paradox. For her chief accuser, Cozy Corner Mike Cochran had, with others of his ilk, suavely branded her as a blackmailer masquerading as an angel of mercy in the slums, and a potential assassin.

Ignominy unbelievable had been her portion then.

Now, it needed no great exercise of her shattered remnants of intuition to discern that her fate was sealed.

In the midst of the inhibition of this, her last hope, she was thankful that her parents were both dead; and she realized as well the overwhelming logic of Joseph Bradish's last plea to her to marry him, not alone on account of his ardent regard for her, but also because of what he had so pithily summed up then, and which had now actually occurred. Joe's last argument was:

"Marion, you are very young, very unsophisticated, and very self-willed. Of course, settlement work is a beautiful thing. But you have behind you no organization—you are an orphan, without even influential friends. You are far too attractive to escape unnoticed in the underworld where you go. Sooner or later something will happen. It is far easier to become involved in some deplorable—even tragic—situation than you realize. 'Frame-ups' exist in real life. Your life is like a pyramid. It has four sides. Yet you persistently refuse to look at any side but the side which your inexperience leads you to think is all that exists. I wish you had less pride. Pride is a dangerous thing—as dangerous as any other vice—or more so."

And she had replied: "Your life is spent in amusing people. You are an actor. You're a make-believe man, always in character. In a way it is an utterly selfish life. And you are piqued at me for not consenting to become a mere marionette—a pretty toy to gratify another phase of your selfishness. It is you, Joe, who refuse to look at the other three sides of life's pyramid. The side I deal with daily—or nightly, if needs arise—is not as pleasant as facing an audience, applauding your uncanny cleverness in what you term 'your art.' There are no fat checks at the box-office at the week-end; no luxurious Pullmans or more luxurious hotels in my scheme of things. Only sacrifice, sometimes of many things which a woman craves. Yet I shall continue. And please don't mention marriage to me again—unless you really love me enough to work by and with me among the unfortunates of the slums."

How prophetic Joe's words had been Marion realized less than a week later, when she met Cozy Corner Mike Cochran. He was a short, stocky man, remind-

ing her of nothing so much as a well-groomed Shetland pony at first. Cochran met her in the vestibule of a hotel with a shady name, where a young woman lay, very ill. It was not a nice place, although more than well patronized, especially after nightfall.

The boss had been terse of speech and, to her surprise, at the end of the interview, more embarrassed than one could have believed of a creature whom rumor said made and unmade city and State officials, from mayors down to foremen of street-cleaning gangs.

He grew almost deprecatory at what he termed "throwing your life away around dives." And he had asked her not to "preach."

To all of which Marion Poole had been blind and deaf—so far as complying with his requests was concerned. Thereafter, Cozy Corner Mike had called on her, at her modest lodgings in the shadow of the little chapel jutting on the edge of the whirlpool of lust and crime in which her work took her.

Cozy Corner Mike's friends would have been as amazed as Marion to have witnessed his demeanor on that occasion. For Mike seemed to exhibit traits that reminded her of Joe Bradish, only the personality of the men was so unlike that it was difficult to credit this omnipotent politician with any such callow emotion as "love."

Marion laughed, pointblank, in his face.

Then, as he persisted in his avowal, her imperious beauty flamed into a wrath that made her more seductive than before, when she ordered him to leave.

Cozy Corner Mike Cochran left.

They met again, in the same disreputable hotel where they had first faced each other. Marion, roused from sleep, had hurried down in response to a note from the sick girl.

The rest of the situation was simplicity itself.

Vague hints and monosyllabic warnings from several women whom she had previously befriended impelled Marion to thrust a pistol into her reticule whenever she went out at night.

Before meeting with Cochran she had never carried a weapon, day or night. It gave her a feeling of more security, however, as she hesitated at the entrance to the rendezvous named in the note. She would have turned back to her home or, at least, have summoned one of the blue-coated men nominally "on guard" in the neighborhood but for her pride.

She disregarded the fantom of intuition which halted her steps, and went in. In the room where the dying girl was supposed to be lying she found the boss.

Even to save herself from the menace of long, weary years in a prison, Marion Poole found it impossible, on the witness-stand, to literally tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth.

It was too revolting, too incredible.

Especially after hearing the quiet, modulated perjuries of Mike Cochran and the equally well-machined corroboration which the other denizens of the establishment furnished.

They stuck to their story.

All the seasoned art of Byron Bartnett, himself an author of a standard text-book on "cross-examination of witnesses," had been pitted in vain against their well-rehearsed lies.

Cochran swore with just sufficient emphasis and no more to give his story an air of extreme credibility, that "Miss Poole sent for me to meet her there, and then demanded that I pay her ten thousand dollars, or she would accuse me in the papers of participating in the operation of that part of town."

The same Cochran who had tried to kiss her lips—when she struggled to draw her pistol to protect herself.

The mere madness of such a wanton act she could condone.

For Marion Poole knew well that, to some men, such a token of surrender carries a splendor undying. She knew it from the hot words of entreaty of Joe Bradish, who for once was not "a make-believe man," when he asked her to share his future.

Her contact with the sordid side of life had in no sense lessened her personal modesty, however, and that was one reason why, when trying to testify in her own

behalf, Marion Poole had hesitated, equivocated, and, before the astute Assistant District Attorney Fielding had finished her cross-examination, she had floundered hopelessly in a maze of self-contradiction and frantic mental plunges, hither and yon, that brought a cold smile of derision to the face of the foreman of the jury.

Even the judge at last interposed, with sarcastic gravity, and sustained the objections of her counsel; and Marion left the stand utterly broken at her frightful ordeal.

One thing might have given her story an air of credibility, as her counsel pointed out, and sustained the meager "reasonable doubt" in the minds of the jury which Barnett tried, valiantly, to instil.

That was the note from the desperately sick girl which Marion testified she had received.

But, there was no note.

Marion remembered, and testified, that she had placed it in her bag, when leaving her lodgings. She also denied, point-blank, ever sending any message to Cozy Corner Mike Cochran that night, or on any other occasion.

The lack of the note, however, and the presence of her chief accuser with his arm in a sling; the testimony of the physician that he had been wounded by a bullet of the same caliber as her pistol; the empty chamber of the weapon—although how it came to be empty, Marion had not the slightest recollection beyond the fact that she was positive she never discharged it; although she admitted wrenching open the bag and drawing it out "to protect herself"—all these corroborative circumstances lost none of their potentiality in the summing up of Assistant District Attorney Fielding.

Even her youth and beauty were turned into no less potent weapons to aid in her conviction.

The tense atmosphere of the court-room, nascent with unborn horror, roused her from her stupefied reverie.

The judge was not yet on the bench.

And, out of the mist of faces, far, far back, one single countenance differentiated itself from the balance, standing out with uncanny clearness.

It was the face of Smut O'Malley.

Marion knew it. But not by name. Merely as the face of a man who had been with Cochran the day she first met him, when on her errand of comforting a dying girl.

Again she wondered what had become of Joseph Bradish.

He had left the stage to be near her; his small savings had been employed in fruitless efforts to procure her enormous bail, and in payment of her counsel. Marion's own little fortune was not available for a bond, nor could the principal be used in her defense; the income she had already largely disbursed in her settlement work and her own living. But Joe, up to this moment, had been more than loyal.

He had never missed a day in court; wherein he scrutinized the proceedings with almost professional intentness.

To-night he was not there.

Marion fancied that the talented youth whose love she had flouted and whose advice she had spurned, could not endure the ordeal of the verdict.

She roused again.

The court attendants were jabbering.

Spectators, lawyers, witnesses and the jury rose to their feet.

There was an awed silence, broken only by the rustle of a silken robe as Court Officer Ward held open the door leading from the private hall communicating with the judge's chambers.

Marion saw the self-same hateful bow as the robed figure ascended the bench. Then, with the rest, she sat down again. The clerk of the court alone remained on his feet.

CHAPTER IV.

HIS HONOR EXPLODES A BOMB.

THE jury answered to their names, one by one. Then the clerk said:

"Prisoner, rise and look upon the jury. Jury, look upon the prisoner." He droned the words as if intoning a psalm. "How say you, gentlemen of the jury, have you agreed upon a verdict?"

"We have!" said the man with the

eolian-harp hair. "Guilty, as charged in the indictment."

"And so say you all, gentlemen of the jury?"

Twelve heads bobbed the damning affirmative, like corks on a seine, signaling the netting of its prey.

The clerk turned to the judge.

"Be seated, gentlemen of the jury," said the man on the bench, in the crisp, colorless accents that all who heard so well remembered. He reached forward with the odd gesture characteristic of him toward the ink-well, poising the pen momentarily above the orifice, like a surgeon about to lance a boil.

Then he drove it into the ink, withdrew it, wrote a few lines in the book before him, blotted it, patted it with a precise, neatly manicured hand, closed the book, replaced the pen, leaned back in his chair, and toyed with his chin, as if immersed in thought.

Assistant District Attorney Fielding was on his feet.

"If your honor please," said he, with the oleaginous tone of a general who had only to dispose of a crumbling fragment of a once formidable enemy, "I wish to move for an immediate sen—"

Instantly Byron Bartnett was on his feet.

"Before your honor takes cognizance of the motions of the district attorney, may I be heard?"

"Proceed!" said his honor, in a bored tone, as his eyes wandered to the defendant, whose pallid face was redeemed only by the glory of her defiant hair and the stony blackness of her mistless, beautiful eyes.

"I should like to have the jury polled."

The man on the bench nodded, indolently, toward the clerk. The perfectly futile formality was short. Each man, when his name was called, answered "guilty."

"And now," continued Bartnett, with the ringing challenge of an undismayed fighter, drawing back a clubbed musket to confront a machine gun, "I desire to make a motion for a new trial."

"On what grounds?" asked the man on the bench.

"On the usual statutory ground that the verdict is against the law and the weight of the evidence."

His honor glanced inquiringly at the district attorney, who was smiling, sardonically. His honor patted a document with his well-manicured hand, with precisely the same gesture that the absent Joe Bradish had watched the same document patted in the judge's chambers.

"Of course, we oppose the motion," said Fielding, "which, I take it, counsel makes as a mere matter of form, and to preserve the rights of the defendant, in case an appeal is contemplated."

The latent sarcasm tinging his tone indicated that Mr. Fielding knew, as well as the attorney for the defense knew, that no appeal could succeed, by even the wildest conjecture, in the face of the recorded testimony—particularly that of the defendant herself.

"Do you wish to argue the motion?" queried the man on the bench, of Bartnett.

"I do," was the emphatic rejoinder. "But, your honor, the hour is late—"

The man on the bench leaned forward, his gesture conveying as much of studied courtesy as that which flavored his reply. He even indulged in a slight but characteristic smile.

"If counsel for the defense will be as succinct as possible, I will accord him a hearing here and now."

Assistant District Attorney Fielding, still smiling, sardonically, resumed his seat.

Squaring his massive shoulders and throwing back his big head with its crown of thick, iron-gray hair, Bartnett launched into his argument. It was practically a résumé of his speech for the defense, except he also included in it various objections and exceptions recorded on the trial. His honor yawned, politely, after a while, masking it behind his well-groomed fingers; while Bartnett battled on, gaining confidence and power until he finished.

Meanwhile, all others in the room, save only the man on the bench and the defendant, were bathing in the glutinous rivers of their emotions. They waited, despite all this tedium, waited as they had waited dur-

ing the prosaic mechanics of the trial, for this long-delayed hour, to sate their morbid minds with the irrefragible memory of a strikingly handsome girl broken by the juggernaut of legality.

"Does the district attorney wish to reply to this argument?" satirically inquired the robed automaton, when Bartnett had concluded.

"No, your honor," replied Fielding with an amused expression.

"Very well," came in crisp tones from the bench. "Let the stenographer enter your waiver of argument, to preserve the form of the record."

He reached for his pen, opened the journal, stabbed at the ink-well and wrote a few lines with a firm hand; blotted it; patted it; reclosed the book and replaced the pen.

"The motion of counsel for defendant to set aside the verdict of conviction, on the ground that the same is contrary to law and against the weight of evidence," said he, in even, clipped tones, "is granted."

He paused.

Had a bomb sent the robed figure skyward, the stupefaction of his hearers could not have been more pronounced at the unforseen circumstance. There are nuances even to silence, and this one was both weird and profound.

"A new trial is hereby ordered," continued his honor, "meanwhile, let the clerk enter the order of the court discharging the defendant in her own recognizance, until the next trial term. Will counsel for defendant please step this way?"

A low murmur swept the audience.

Instantly the imperative gavel rang out in his honor's hands.

"If there is the slightest disorder, I will order the room cleared," came his clear, emphatic tones.

Byron Bartnett literally tottered to the bar. In his previous legal experience the ruling and result were without precedent. His honor leaned forward, whispered, and leaned back.

Bartnett turned and beckoned to his client. Marion Poole rose and stepped to his side. The man on the bench bent toward her as her counsel returned to his seat, and whispered a few words.

The spectators, already taut with the amazing and totally unexpected dénouement, craned their necks. An ominous silence hung like a heavy pall over the watchers.

Marion Poole rejoined her counsel, and they walked out of the side entrance, reserved for witnesses and jurors.

Her beautiful face, tinged a moment before with the flush of hope at the pregnant words which had lifted her, in a trice, from the abyss of the lost to at least temporary freedom, seemed to those who could discern it clearly, to have again become the pallid mask of a corpse.

A murmur ran thfough the room.

The imperative gavel rang from the bench, sharp, authoritative.

Again, silence.

Then the man on the bench turned to the jury.

"Gentlemen, you are excused for the balance of the trial term." He turned to the clerk. "This court will reconvene tomorrow at ten o'clock."

The robed figure was walking quietly toward the doorway leading into his chambers and vanished, before even Smut O'Malley could expel the breath which he had drawn inward at the summary manner the jury's verdict had been set aside.

Only Court Officer Ward, of all present, seemed to retain his phlegm, as he followed the figure to chambers and opened the door with the same unmoved face which always masked his thoughts.

He stepped into the chamber with the stealthy tread of a mountain-lion, and flashed on all the lights flooding the darkened interior.

"Thank you, Ward," said the other. "I shall not need you again to-night."

"Good night, your honor," said the attendant, as he closed the folding door.

The court officer's swift, snaky gaze again swept the chamber. There was no sign of any other human being.

As the narrow orifice between the doors closed, Ward stepped down the corridor, out through the now empty court-room, straight to the small door marked "Private," which he again entered and reclosed.

It was now nearly nine o'clock, as the big timepiece in the hall attested.

Ward found Smut O'Malley sitting with a fresh cigar in his lips and Ike Black, the *Sentinel* man, smirking like a baboon from his perch on the desk.

"Well," chortled the scribe, mirthlessly, "as Cozy Corner would say: '*Churches la femmy*,' meaning: 'Beware of a skirt.' Can you beat that blow-back? Twelve good hand-picked boobs and true, with lima-bean brains, come clean. His nibs in the black silk nightgown wilts." He reached for the desk phone. "Gimme Marlowe, one-two-six-five, private wire—yes," said he to the operator. "Hello, Chief. This is Ike. Say, he sprung the dame. Yep. Naw, no suspenders on the sentence, not even garters. He sprung her, flat. Yep. Set the verdict aside, blew off the jail door, made a date with her and gave the jury a Mexican stand-off. Spared twelve lines but sent me home to reline the garbage cans. Yep. Both here. Aw right, wait!"

He passed the phone to Ward.

The court officer inclined his head, saying, merely, as he took up the instrument: "This is Ward, Chief. I get you."

He transferred it to Smut O'Malley, who, in turn, gave a gruff "Hello!" as Ward slipped out of the door. Smut handed the phone back to Ike Black, and rose from the chair, his dour face as blank as the sole of a shoe. "Hello, Chief," said the newspaperman. "Yes. All right. About eleven, eh? I'll be on hand. Well, it's got to be big to wedge in after that hour. Did I ever turn weasel on you? So long, Chief."

He hung up and hopped down from the flat-topped desk. He was alone.

A charwoman, laden with tools of her humble but needful calling, opened the door leading into the hall which ran between the court-room and the chambers of His Honor, Archibald Watson.

A man was standing very close to the crack between the folding doors. He whirled as the light from the empty court-room flared across the short corridor. The charwoman, perceiving who it was, failed to notice the gleaming something which the man thrust into his pocket with a deft twist of his wrist, without even bending the balance of his arm.

"Oh, Misther Ward, it's you, is it!"

He came down to where she was standing.

"What is it, Maggie?"

"I was just afther going in to tidy up to the judge's chambers."

"He's still there. Come back in an hour."

The woman left.

Ward carefully closed the door behind her, and again resumed his watch at the crack in the folding doors. The man at the desk was rising.

Very deliberately, he removed his gown; opened a small wardrobe and hung it within; then the splash of falling water tinkled through the turgid silence. Presently, Ward could discern the outlines of a silk hat, then portions of an astrachan collar, and, lower down, the handle of a cane.

The door to the wardrobe closed.

The figure was moving toward the hall door, and Ward, poised on one foot, was ready to vanish down the tiny darkened corridor, when the insistent tinkle of the phone checked the sole occupant of chambers from emerging.

"Who is it? Oh, good evening. Yes. You wish to see me. Before eleven? I haven't dined, yet. Important? Yes, I suppose so. Very well, I'll get a cab and drive over, at once."

Several of the attachés in the lower hall, uncovered, respectfully, as the stately figure of Judge Archibald Watson emerged from the private elevator, and walked across the corridor to the main entrance, clicking his cane on the tessellated floor.

He paused only to drop an envelope in the letter-box before emerging. A taxi was idling past. He hailed it and entered, after giving an address. The machine darted away. Presently, its occupant looked back. A second machine was following him.

He smiled, derisively.

"It looks, on the whole, like an interesting evening," he assured himself, lighting a Havana whose aroma filled the interior as his vehicle smartened its pace.

He smiled again, this time more satirically. He was thinking of a figure lying outside the window of the chambers which he had just quitted — a huddled figure, humped up in the little L-like space where the wall darted sharply inward—in the same alley which terminated in a blank wall at one end, and at the other with the opening leading to the main thoroughfare, which was efficiently barred by a pair of decrepit iron gates; a figure whose face, could it have been seen by any chance observer who might have come into that unfrequented, blind passageway would have revealed the features of Joseph Bradish; and by his side a black bag.

But the man in the taxi felt quite sure that there was little or no chance of any one entering the alley; and still less occasion for any worry about the discovery of the huddled figure in the obscurity of the L-shaped enclosure.

As little chance, in fact, as there was of Marion Poole seeing Joseph Bradish this evening. He knew she was waiting for Joe —at the latter's apartment. She was waiting there for the man who had been missing from the court-room, because the judicial figure on the bench had told her to go there and wait until Joe came back.

That was what had terrified Marion Poole, even at the instant of her release from the clutches of "the law"—that misnamed monster who apparently did the bidding of Cozy Corner Mike Cochran, like a trained bear obeying the whims of its captor.

The figure in the taxicab had made his mandate to Marion Poole as imperative as if he had not already ordered her release. He knew the girl would obey him. Broken by her cruel ordeal, stunned by her unexpected deliverance from the jaws of jail—how could she be expected to do otherwise?

There was no more doubt that she would be there—that she was there—at the very moment, than there could be any question of the fact that the keys to that same apartment of Joe Bradish's were reposing in the pockets of the man musing in the taxicab; or that the figure of the man lying huddled alongside the black bag in the L-shaped enclosure would have revealed, to any chance intruder in the infrequented alley, the features of Joe Bradish.

He puffed his Havana, thoughtfully, and peered ahead, through the glass of the taxi, past the humped-up figure of the chauffeur driving, through the wisps of gray fog filtering down in the still young night, to where a building rose, white and incredibly tall.

He flashed another glance backward at the skulking taxi that was still following his own.

"Decidedly," he affirmed again, "a very interesting evening—particularly to Court Officer Ward and Smut O'Malley; perhaps, also, not entirely without interest to Ike Black, of the *Sentinel,* ere that immaculate journal appears in the morning. And, most of all, I am quite sure, to myself. Heigh-ho! Well, here we are at the renowned Mr. Cochran's place of abode."

He chuckled, sarcastically.

"Wonder what he'll have to say?"

His face, however, was stern and grave as he opened the door and descended from the machine. He paid the driver and walked unconcernedly inside.

Out of the tail of his eye he could see the other taxi turning back.

Whereat, the figure of his honor, Archibald Watson, grinned broadly for an instant.

Not alone at the taxi, which had suddenly lost interest in him, on seeing him arrive at the door of the Catskill Arms, where Cozy Corner Mike Cochran lived.

Partly that, however, as well as the fact that the letter the judicial figure had mailed on quitting the court-house had been addressed to Marion Poole. What was more, it had been in the handwriting of Joe Bradish, the undeniably genuine handwriting of that one-time suppliant for her affections.

It was also pointed but brief, reading:

MY DEAR MARION:

Should you be so fortunate as to be exonerated and released to-night, go directly to my apartment, as you will be told to go, perhaps, by a friend who may give you the same instructions, orally, before you get this letter by special delivery. Remain there until I arrive. I may be

delayed. Trust me, Marion, dear, and believe me, always, devotedly yours,

JOE.

Recollection of the tenor of that letter imbued the smile of the Hon. Archibald Watson with much geniality, as he approached the hall-boy at the telephone desk.

"Please announce me to Mr. Cochran," said he.

The boy at the desk obeyed. He had seen the Hon. Archibald Watson on several prior occasions at the same place. He turned, after a word or two over the wire.

"You're to go right up, sir."

The judicial figure inclined his head and entered the elevator.

CHAPTER V.

"GOOD NIGHT, JUDGE!"

MARION POOLE emerged from the frowning portals of the court-house, escorted by her counsel, Byron Bartnett, and pursued by the morbid spectators, whose appetite for sensation had been whetted anew by her dramatic release.

They sought refuge in a cab and were driven away.

The change in the girl's fortunes seemed to leave her quite dazed. She could hardly credit her senses, until the wisps of fog showed her that she was undeniably at liberty again.

"Most extraordinary!" exclaimed Bartnett, at last. "I don't understand Watson's change of heart, at all. Why, Cochran got him that appointment to the bench. By the way, what did he say to you?"

"He gave me a message from Mr. Bradish. He told me to go to Joe's apartment and wait until I heard from him."

"From the judge?"

"No, from Joe."

"I don't understand that, either. I didn't know Joe knew the judge. He never mentioned it to me at any of our conferences."

"Nor did I," said Marion, simply. "What would you advise?"

"Well," said Bartnett, with a slow smile, "if you're convinced that you'd better suspend settlement work for the time, in view of what his honor did before he gave you that advice, I should do exactly as he advised. What do you think?"

"I can scarcely think—yet," said the girl. "It's all so—so much different that I dared to hope, especially after the case went to the jury. The judge seemed quite severe on me, don't you think—then?"

Bartnett tossed his mane.

"Well, something's happened. I don't particularly care what it was. You're out. Now, as we happen to be driving in a direction quite the opposite to that we must take to get to Mr. Bradish's lodgings, I think we'll turn around."

The landlady, it seemed, had also been notified that Mr. Bradish expected a guest. She ushered Marion and her counsel into his suite without parley. The girl removed her hat and cloak, and took the chair the lawyer placed for her at the fire glowing in the grate. It was very homelike and comfortable.

"As it is getting rather late," said Bartnett, "I think I'll be getting back to my family, if you'll excuse me. By the way, hadn't I better make a reservation for you at some hotel, for the night, and have your things taken up? You'll be leaving here, of course, soon after Joe gets back."

"If you will be so kind," said Marion. "By the way, I wonder where Joe is? He wasn't in court to-night. He's always been there, before to-night.

"I missed him, too," admitted the attorney. "Perhaps he went to see the judge in your behalf. That might explain both the message and his absence."

Marion shook her head. "I hardly think so. It isn't like Joe to keep himself away at such a time as this. I have a feeling—"

She shivered. It was more than a feeling. It was a premonition that Joe was in some kind of peril. Of what nature, Marion could not remotely conjecture—for feminine intuition, while sensitive, is not always specific.

The attorney was watching her keenly. He was altogether too mystified at the

sudden change of attitude on the part of Judge Watson to really comprehend how it could have come about that his honor, after a peculiarly scathing charge to the jury, should immediately have set aside the verdict the jury rendered, when that verdict was based on his own instructions to them.

Moreover, Bartnett had divined something deep down in the eyes of the robed figure on the bench, when he had been summoned to the judge's side after the verdict had been thus summarily set aside.

His honor had merely requested Bartnett to have his client step up for a private word. This, too, was as unprecedented as the granting of the motion for a new trial. The eyes were not as judicial as the accents of the judge's voice. They were deep, yearning—and even more. The lawyer was perplexed. He wondered if Marion, too, had noticed that most unusual expression when she had stepped up for the message which the robed figure had given her.

However, when he spoke again, Bartnett was content to merely observe:

"You have had a trying time. Mr. Bradish is a very capable sort of a chap. He sent you a message to come here. You're here. Now, I'm going home to my family. You'll hear from him no doubt—"

The sentence was interrupted by the peal of the apartment bell.

Bartnett went to the door. Marion rose, nervously.

"Special delivery letter for Miss Poole," said the messenger. "Have her sign it in person, please."

Marion opened and read the note when the messenger departed. She told the lawyer that it was in Joe's hand, and that she would wait his return. He glanced, curiously, at the postmark.

"It was mailed," said Bartnett, "about fifteen minutes after we left the court-house, and from the substation in that district. He must have been on his way to see you, and arrived after you had gone."

"Thank you," said she, as he left. "As soon as Joe returns, I'll call you."

Alone, she read and reread the missive, beginning, "My dear Marion," and concluding with "Always, devotedly yours, Joe." It was not particularly reassuring, somehow, although in his handwriting. Her uneasiness, however, grew somewhat less as her drowsiness increased. She had spent an acute day. So Marion Poole curled up in the chair.

She could not know of the figure lying in the L-shaped part of the blind alley between the new court-house and the old opera-house, nor of the black bag by its side—nor that the features of the huddled figure, had they been casually scrutinized by any chance entrant to that infrequented alley, guarded by the decrepit pair of iron gates, would have revealed themselves as the features of the man whose missive she had just perused; any more than she could know that Cozy Corner Mike Cochran was, at that very moment, receiving a caller in his apartments at the Catskill Arms, who had been summoned there, rather peremptorily, it is true, to explain the nature of the judicial proceedings which had resulted in her release from the thrall in which it had pleased Mr. Cochran to enmesh her.

The merciful hypnosis of sleep spread its mantle over her.

She dreamed again of that long-ago spring day when the music of hope had blown in the April breezes, as she took a group of tenement children into the country for an outing, a thing without precedent in their otherwise drab, stained childhood.

In her dream again the mysterious murmurs of the budding trees filtered to her ears; the damp air breathed a kiss to her brow, as if from the lips of her suitor; flowers unfolded their petals to the sun as if they would enfold the whole world in their fragrance.

But in the Catskill Arms, Cozy Corner Mike, turning in his restless pacing of the apartment, where he had been since the verdict was rendered, glared with vengeful eyes at the judicial figure just entering.

In the somnolent, surcharged expectancy of that apartment there were no ringed faces of spectators, as there had been in the court-room, when Marion Poole had been arraigned for the verdict; but there was a tense, repressed antagonism, so virulent that it only fell short of life parleying with death.

"Sit down, judge," ordered Cozy Corner Mike.

He stepped to the window and gazed down on the street below. The second taxicab was loitering near the corner of the private park on which the Catskill Arms abutted. Cozy Corner Mike drew down the window-shade.

The taxi moved away.

The boss took a chair opposite his visitor, and rolled a big, unlighted cigar back and forth between his thick lips. He did not speak. He merely bored his visitor with eyes which had forgotten to wink for several seconds.

Then the phone bell rang sharply.

Cochran lifted the receiver from the table between him and the calm, inscrutable face of the man with the silvered hair, whose neatly manicured hands were patting his stomach, with the same complacent gesture that Joe Bradish had watched from his hiding-place in the chambers of the Hon. Archibald Watson earlier that same evening.

"Hello—Yes—No—I said eleven—Yes, I'm busy now." Cochran hung up viciously. Then he turned to glare again at the figure opposite him, whose unwavering eyes looked back into his own with a gleam of derision that even the Shetland-pony of a man could comprehend, it was so obvious.

"You wished to see me, I believe," said the visitor, leaning forward, his manner no less than his voice conveying the studied courtesy of his demeanor.

"You've said it," snapped Cochran. "I want to know why you handed me a lemon to-night, with that Jane."

"Meaning Miss Poole's release?"

Cochran made a gesture of impatience. "What else?" he curtly demanded.

The man on the other side of the table deliberately reached for a fresh cigar, lighted it, puffed thoughtfully and seemed to weigh well his reply.

"I'm rather surprised at that query," said he, finally. "What else could I do?"

Cochran choked. His tempestuous wrath rendered him incoherent for several seconds. He could only glare, with the eyes of a baffled beast, at the phlegmatic man smoking calmly opposite him.

"I phoned you," he grated, at length, "and told you to give her twenty years. The jury found her guilty of assault to commit murder, didn't they?"

"My dear fellow," smiled the other, "I'm more than surprised at your attitude in this matter. Really, I gave you credit for more perception. Don't you know that such a sentence would have brought down upon me a storm of public criticism—particularly in view of your relations and mine, before this case came up? The newspapers—"

"Aw, cut it out!" interpolated Cochran. "What's the big idea? Are you going to explain—or not?"

His livid face thrust itself forward under his shaggy mop of hair. Cozy Corner Mike was in a very ugly humor, evidently.

"If you care to listen, yes. If not, I'll leave."

Their glances crossed like the blades of two rapiers. Cochran, growling something unintelligible, leaned back in his chair, in turn, and gripped his quivering hands as if to forcibly restrain them from encircling the throat of his caller.

"The whole town knows you put Judge Watson on the bench," began his visitor, suavely. "The whole town knows that you were Marion Poole's accuser. They know, also, that the testimony against her was a frame-up—just as you and I know it. Suppose it could be proved—what then?"

"They didn't prove it in the trial. How could they do it after the trial?"

"Let's consider the facts, impersonally," went on the other. "A letter reached Judge Watson this afternoon, signed by a young man named Joseph Bradish. It contained a copy of a deposition made by the same girl who Miss Poole claimed had sent her a note asking her to come to where the girl was at the point of death in the hotel. That deposition, if true, and if published to-morrow morning in some newspaper, on top of a sentence of twenty years imposed by Judge Watson, known as the friend of Cochran, the accuser of Miss Poole, might have seriously embarrassed both the judge and his friend. The girl's affidavit stated that she had sent such a note as Miss Poole claimed to have received; and she sent it at the request of Smut O'Malley—your lieu-

tenant. Then, the affidavit goes on to state, before Miss Poole arrived, the girl was removed from that room, and you confronted the expected visitor."

"I don't get you at all," stormed Cochran. "But, suppose the girl did make such an affidavit? What kind of a character did she have? And it was only her word, on paper, against the sworn testimony of six other eye and ear witnesses, given in open court. Nix on that stuff—"

"Her character—her real character—was as good as those who accused Miss Poole, because she made that affidavit just before she died," went on the speaker, "at least, this man Bradish claims she made it and is now dead. However, what's done is done. What next?"

Cochran's small, malevolent eyes drew closer together, their lids lowering until only a straight slit revealed their smoldering glare.

"You've said it—what next?" he parroted. "You must think I'm a hick at this game to try to square me with such stuff as that. I made you a judge, didn't I? I told you what to do to-night, didn't I? And you didn't do it, did you? Instead, you come down her with this affidavit-stuff, trying to square yourself. I like your nerve. But, I gotta hand it to you for comin'—after that lemon. I didn't think you'd have the nerve to come."

"Not wholly nerve," murmured the other ironically. "Rather discreet of me, on the whole, I should say, with Court Officer Ward hanging around chambers after the jury had been dismissed—fingering what I think you'd call a 'smoke-wagon'—isn't that the vernacular for a pistol? Both he and Smut followed me down here in a taxi—to make sure I'd come. On the whole, I thought it best to come, especially in view of the alternative—if I hadn't come, that weapon of Court Officer Ward's might have been used to persuade me to come. Really, Mike, you're quite crude in some ways. Give me credit for at least a little human intelligence, won't you? Remember, to the public at large, if not to you, I'm a judge of the high court. But we're not getting on. I asked you—what next?"

"Oh, I'm giving you credit for human intelligence, all right," sneered the boss. "As well as giving you credit for making a date with the dame. That's why you sprung her—deposition be damned and double-damned!" he exploded. "You sprung her, because you saw your chanst to date her up. You fell for that skirt—"

Again he choked from sheer wrath. The other man laughed.

"Don't tell me the grapes are sour, Mike!" he jeered. "Well, suppose I do hold Miss Poole in some small esteem?" The laughter had fled from his lips. They were stern, almost white. His own eyes gleamed, frostily. His suave manner no longer evinced itself. "Suppose I have—as you phrase it—fallen for a skirt? You fell for her, too, didn't you? And when she refused to fall for you, you tried to send her to a prison with one of the rottenest frame-ups that ever was attempted in this town—a frame-up to which you've just admitted you were a party. And you expect me to pull your putrid chestnuts out of the fire—with such a girl's soul as the stake?"

Cochran's face was a wrestling ground between a coming triumph and a rage that threatened to submerge it. Then his habitual craft reasserted itself. His trembling hand ceased to quiver as he smoothed back the mane that streamed down over his forehead.

"You dated the dame when you sprung her to-night," said he, sarcastically. "Now you're talking about her soul. Why don't you appoint yourself *guardian ad litem* of her soul? You'll be tellin' me that next, I s'pose. Now, judge, I guess you and I understand each other, all right. You're through—get me?"

"I hear you," said the other. "But, Mike, I hope you won't start anything just because you and I don't agree on this matter. There's other cases coming up—"

"You've said it again—there's others. But you won't sit on any of 'em."

The judicial figure seemed to shrink several degrees.

"To-morrow," purred Cozy Corner Mike quietly, "the *Sentinel* 'll carry a nice, readable yarn. I made you, Watson. And the first time I ever ask anything big of

you, you hand me a lemon. You'll never hand me another. I guess that's all. You can talk your head off. I don't care. I got nothing to lose. You're the judge—and you lose. Good night!"

Without deigning to look again in the direction of the other man, Cozy Corner Mike Cochran rose, walked to the window, and lifted the shade. A man walking up and down the parkway opposite, took off his hat and replaced it.

It was Court Officer Ward, but now attired in the habiliments of a plain citizen.

Another figure emerged from the trees and crossed the street. It was Ike Black, the thin-lipped, cynical reporter for the *Sentinel*. He walked up the street, crossed the boulevard, and walked down again, in the direction of the Catskill Arms, just as the somber tones of the giant clock on the city court-house, two miles away, boomed faintly the hour of 11 P.M., and just as the figure of the Hon. Archibald Watson emerged from the apartment of Cozy Corner Mike Cochran.

For one who has been summarily condemned, the judge was singularly at ease. Also, he did not appear to be in any undue hurry to quit the vicinity. He walked toward the elevator to a small, dark alcove hall, entered it, fumbled in the pockets of his long coat, and waited with a certitude that carried as much decision as the terse dismissal that he had just been accorded by the occupant of the apartment.

Likewise, he was smiling broadly, when the elevator slid noiselessly upward, some two minutes later, and Ike Black stepped out, walking down the corridor toward where he was waiting in the darkened alcove.

To reach the apartment Ike Black must pass the place where the hiding man was ensconced.

That, however, was not all.

To reach the nearest street-car line or taxi stand from the Catskill Arms, when leaving that apartment house, the figure waiting in the darkened alcove must himself pass a bit of shrubbery on the parkway. And in this bit of shrubbery, while the figure of the Hon. Archibald Watson was thus avoiding a meeting face to face with Ike Black in the hallway of the apartment, the figure of Court Officer Ward was also waiting for his honor to emerge, cross the street, and seek out a vehicle to return to his own place of abode.

And Court Officer Ward had already seen to it that there was no taxi closer than this spot to the entrance to the Catskill Arms; the nearest one being on the public hack-stand on the other side of the boulevard, and along the parkway.

The driver of the vehicle thus stationed on the park side of the boulevard also happened—through one of those coincidences which are sometimes prearranged—to be the same driver of the same vehicle who had brought the Hon. Archibald Watson to the Catskill Arms some thirty minutes or so before.

CHAPTER VI.

A TELL-TALE SILK HAT.

THE element of the unexpected gives zest and relish to some occasions and poignant sorrow to others. Quite early in his career Cozy Corner Mike Cochran had learned to eliminate all chance, so far as he was capable, from his little scheme of things.

In politics, that mist-shrouded "hinterland" between the work-a-day world and the seats of the mighty, Mike moved and had his being. Just what he did for a livelihood the mass of the people did not know. Yet he was always well supplied with money, lived at present in the ultra-fashionable Catskill Arms Apartments, drove an imported car, was frequently mentioned as "among those present" at big public receptions, banquets and important political conferences, and maintained a cryptic silence in public on all topics wherein most men are garrulous.

That was why he was now pacing the apartment in the Catskill Arms awaiting the arrival of Ike Black, reporter for the *Sentinel*. Shrewd, hard, calculating, remorseless when crossed, he was determined to have revenge on Judge Archibald Watson for disobeying his orders in the Marion Poole case.

Cochran to-night, in fact, was in the most terrible rage he had known for years.

The nearest approach to his present fury had been the day he called on Marion Poole, told her in his blunt but hesitating and somewhat embarrassed fashion of his infatuation for her, and had listened to her ironical laugh.

The laugh of the beautiful settlement-worker drove Cochran to the brink of insanity; for he was more honest in his proposal of marriage than he had ever been in all the years of his devious career as a political boss.

Unlike many men in politics or public life, Cochran had lived an almost monastic existence. He never drank, smoked or gambled. He worked unremittingly, silently. And he was as much a product of the time and political system as a steel girder is the product of a furnace—and as hard.

He had begun life as a newsboy.

Now, he was a political power, by dint of an indomitable will, a cunning brain and a genius for organization.

Early in his budding career the *Sentinel* had "panned him."

Having just "made a turn," which left him quite strong, financially, Mike bought the controlling interest of the *Sentinel* over night from a bank holding a mortgage on its property.

No one on the newspaper knew of the change.

Even the editors who received instructions to "soft pedal" on the political boss, thereafter, were ignorant of the actual ownership.

That was one secret of Mike's success.

He worked in the profoundest secrecy.

And his plans, consequently, were consummated and carried out before the public had time to be enlightened regarding them. Even the *Sentinel* sometimes still spoke of him in a deprecatory way; it quoted bankers and men of high standing in "interviews" which deplored "the machine," its leader, and its methods.

But, after a bit, the same sheet veered a trifle, and presented such cogent arguments in favor of the "public improvements" which the boss had resolved upon first and thereafter advocated, that the readers were deluded into the belief that, after all, "Mike wasn't as black as he was painted."

Therein was the other and crowning secret of Cozy Corner Mike's success.

He controlled the mightiest financial engine in the city—public credit—and exploited it both wisely and well.

He was entirely too shrewd to allow his enemies—and they were legion—any opportunity to accuse him of downright thefts from the public treasury.

There was no incentive whatever for him to steal.

It was far more profitable to grant franchises, through his henchmen in office, and with the slogan "boost and build" to gull the public from whom he received the fat "rake-offs," which his power made possible.

Silent and self-effacing, Mike, until this galling night, had long believed himself both impregnable and infallible.

The worst of it all was that he was still completely infatuated with Marion Poole.

Unspoiled, sincere, beautiful and cultured, she was so angelically desirable that he sought her hand in marriage.

His self-love had been cruelly wounded by her almost contemptuous rebuff.

Infuriated at thus being flouted, Mike sought revenge.

Now, that cup, too, had been snatched from his lips by the summary setting aside of the verdict of "guilty" that same night.

The temerity of Judge Watson amazed him.

He held Watson in the hollow of his political hand.

Once he closed down on the man who had been guilty of such audacity as to refuse to do his bidding, the Hon. Archibald Watson would not be merely crushed—he would be pulverized into the minutest particles.

Now, as he paced the apartment in the Catskill Arms, waiting for Ike Black to come in, he reveled in the thought of the summary punishment which he would mete out to Watson.

He pulled his watch from his pocket.

It was seven minutes after eleven. Ike was late. Also, recently, the reporter had been rather too familiar. He would dis-

cipline Ike, too, if that youth did not mend his ways.

The bell rang.

Cozy Corner Mike opened the door.

A strong odor of liquor preceded the entrance of the man for whom he had been waiting.

"You're drunk!" said Mike irascibly.

"Not ex-hic-zhackly. Jus' lit up a little." The fellow staggered to a chair. "Be aw right, prezhently." He seemed to pull himself together.

Mike studied him as Ike lit a cigarette, blew a cloud of smoke through his nostrils, then replaced the "coffin-nail," allowing it to hang from his lower lip at an acute angle.

"I'm aw right, now," reiterated the man who had just come in. "Hit up a couple sulfuric acid cocktails after I heard that case. Watson's a nut. I tole you, didn't I, that he'd dated up the dame?"

"How did you know?"

"Why—he called her up to the bench and slipped it to her in plain—hic—view. Wot else? If he wasn't goin' to date her, why did he turn her up, like that? Everybody's chewin' it over. Her reputashun's gone—his 'll be gone before morning."

"How so?" demanded Mike, less irascibly.

"Why—if we had somethin' to hang on him—"

The fellow in the chair did not finish the sentence. Instead, he leered, craftily, at the boss. His gleaming eyes did more to convince his hearer that he was "aw right now" than his assertion of that fact.

Cochran rose and took a turn around the room before replying.

"He was just here, trying to square himself," said the boss, at last, in a colorless voice.

"Oh, yes. But, how's he goin' to square himself? Didn't he slam it inta the jury? Didn't the jury take his tip? You orter heard Fielding yelp, after he got back inta his office. Swears he'll take this case to the Bar Association. Says Watson's not fit to be a judge."

"Fielding takes himself too seriously. If he'd talk less, he'd be more fit for the job of an assistant district attorney," sententiously replied Cochran.

"You're right at that," elegantly returned the reporter. "Well, chief, you know we gotta go in with our first plates by one-fifteen. I guess you wanta slip me somethin'—no?"

"Did any one at the *Sentinel* office comment to-night on Judge Watson's setting this verdict aside?" parried the other.

"Comment is good," sneered the newspaper man. "They sent a man to the club to interview the judge; they also been ringin' up his house—and they're all wrong, Little Rollo—all wrong. He's somewhere else—or will be, the balance of this foggy evening. The nerve of him! It was so raw that even the scrub women are blushin'."

Cochran walked back and forth across the apartment, his pudgy hands thrust deep into his trouser-pockets, his mane of hair falling down over his eyes as he bent forward in thought.

"That girl," he began abruptly to the cynically-smiling chap in the chair, from whose nether lip the charred stump of the cigarette yet hung, "who was supposed to send for Miss Poole to come to visit her at the hotel—have you heard anything about her?"

"Why—she's a stiff over in the morgue. She can't let out a rave to even git the Jane."

Cochran did not comment on this. But, mentally, he approved of the other's deduction. Smut O'Malley had been in charge of that young woman until her demise, early the afternoon of that very same day. Smut, according to the judge, must have been negligent. Otherwise there would have been no deposition, such as his honor had hinted at, to cause even a suspicion that the "ends of justice" or the tools thereof, had been manipulated.

"Did you see the judge?" demanded Cochran, after another short communion with his own thoughts.

"Why, everybody saw him," protested the other. "It was in open court—"

"I mean when you were coming in?"

"Just now?"

"Yes." Cochran leaned forward to watch the other.

"He was goin' down in the elevator. I was pressin' the button of the other, down-

stairs. But there was only one of them runnin'."

"Did you see his face?"

"As plain as I see yours, right now."

Cochran did not pursue the subject further, but the other added:

"He looked worried."

Cochran sibilated something between his teeth. He rose and paced the room again. His head tossed like that of an indignant Shetland who has been permitted to smell of a pack measure of oats and who has seen it drawn rudely away.

The pangs of rejected love swept him when he thought of the girl he had lost; fury incarnate stormed through his brain when he remembered the manner in which the doubly distilled hatred which he had conceived for Marion Poole, following her scornful rejection of his suit, had been balked by Judge Watson.

The reporter rose.

Cochran's back was toward him.

A satanically cynical gleam — almost a sneer—flamed in his eyes and flickered across his face, as if, in that instant, Ike Black felt for Mike Cochran sentiments not entirely foreign to those which he had professed to hold for Judge Watson, while telephoning from the little room marked "Private" on the door, immediately following the verdict.

Cochran walked unsteadily into another room, bent over, and toyed with the knob of a safe built into the wall. He opened the door, took out a packet of papers, closed and relocked the safe, and went back to where the reporter was impatiently waiting.

"Ike," said he, "here's your chance. Here's a story on Watson that 'll make the whole town sit up and take notice. I'm going to give it to you. Use it, if you want to. Can it if you don't use it—better burn it, because, if you don't, it's so hot that it'll burn up, itself. Crow yourself black in the face at the office, but don't say nothin' to them as to where you got it. Get me?"

"Yep!" returned the other. "'Scuse me, chief, I gotta be getting back. It's late."

"If you should run acrost Smut, to-night, anywheres, tell him I want to see him, right away," said Cochran, casually, with a brusk gesture. "Right away," he added.

"Aw right. Good night."

Cozy Corner Mike closed the door behind the retreating figure and once more began pacing the apartment.

To and fro he walked. Beads of sweat stood out on his forehead. His hands clenched and unclenched. Power he had and wealth a plenty, as such things go.

But, love, the boss knew not—only hate.

His searing brain became a pit in which the flames of hell rioted, unchecked. They rose higher and higher, fed by his adamant resolve to punish Judge Watson to the very limit of his ability, now that Watson had made it impossible to punish Marion Poole.

For Cozy Corner Mike Cochran was not altogether, "as black as he was painted." Not even as black as his former visitor had intimated to him, before the arrival of the *Sentinel* reporter.

He loved Marion Poole at first sight.

He had always loved her—would always love her.

And no man who loves a pure woman is wholly, irretrievably doomed.

Yet this fact but added to the horror eddying and swirling through the luxurious apartment through which he was walking for ages, it seemed, when the doorbell rang, sharply.

He went to it and opened it.

The elevator-boy stood, apologetically, in the foyer of the private hall.

"I beg yo' pahdon, Mistah Cochran," said the youth; "but when I comes up to tuhn off the lights on dis flohr, jus' now, I found—dis!"

He extended a silk hat which the boss instantly recognized from the initials "A. W.," inside of it, as the one which his first caller had worn into the apartment perhaps an hour and a half before.

The effect of the silk hat upon the boss was electrifying.

He had not the slightest idea in the world how it had come to be lying in the hall. Nor did he particularly care.

For, in the ferment of his love-maddened ideas of the last few moments, Cozy Corner Mike Cochran had gone almost as insane as it is possible for any man to go and still preserve the outward semblance of one in whose brain reason still sits enthroned.

He had been thinking of Judge Watson—but in a far different mood than he had referred to him before the *Sentinel* man had left the room.

Now that it was all over—now that the memory of Marion Poole had been rising, like a specter, before him at every turn, with her delicately full crimson lips, above which gleamed her violet eyes with just a touch of the velvety blackness of the Orient in their depths—the tortured boss knew, to the fullest, something of the horrid shame and sorrow which his dominant will had imposed on a refined and cultured young woman.

It was the apotheosis of a day such as he had never before known in all his long, indurated life.

He understood, now, to a degree, at least, why Archibald Watson had risked his judicial reputation in that meeting, and the defiant eyes which he had turned upon his maker and master, Cochran, when the boss had intimated so unmistakably that the judge had been actuated by anything but judicial motives when he had set aside the verdict.

In the sublimated horror that had closed down upon him with the realization that Marion Poole was lost to him, forever, the more especially since Watson had dared to flout his express instructions, Cochran had dived to the nadir of the nethermost hell.

He had never had any intention of allowing Marion Poole to go to prison for twenty years for a crime which she had never committed. It had been his plan to send to the State executive a petition for her pardon; and to sign it himself.

The governor would have granted that petition, instantly.

Thereafter, Cochran had reasoned, Marion Poole would have seen him in a somewhat different light.

No one had ever regretted more than the boss himself had truly repined over the lamentable circumstances in which Marion Poole had been enmeshed.

Before meeting her and falling under the thrall of her personality, the boss despised the gentler sex. At mere sight of Marion Poole, however, all his past aversion had been transformed into a passion to win her, that, aside from his iron will and habit of repressing all but the most necessary of speech, had from that first moment dominated him more tyrannically than he dominated politics.

He knew he was quite mad when he had sought her enchanting lips in the shady hotel, after luring her there, with the message from one of Marion's dying proteges.

Marion's second rebuff had been so precipitate that the resistance she offered was also supplemented by that of the girl whom she had come to aid.

The poor, soiled creature was already in the valley of the shadow. She was not even in the room when Marion arrived. But, in an adjoining one, albeit apparently at the point of death, the girl rose from her couch, staggered to the door of the room she had been taken from, and whipped out a pistol to fire at the boss, pointblank.

Whether she missed through sheer nervousness or weakness was from that moment immaterial.

The bullet penetrated Cozy Corner Mike's upper arm, and the shot aroused the police. The situation was one that called for heroic action—as well as some explanation that would explain.

In no sense had such conditions been premeditated by Cozy Corner Mike any more than he had intended to again thrust his attentions, offensively, upon Marion Poole when he had arranged to have her summoned there, through Smut O'Malley's generalship.

It had been destiny — blind fate — the same as it had been fate which had impelled him to meet her there prior to that occasion, and to warn her, gently, against "too much interference" with the inmates of the slums; especially against "throwing away her life around the dives"; and "not to preach."

But, with a pistol shot ringing out in such a neighborhood at such an hour; with the thud of a heavy-footed policeman on the steps of the hotel; with a beautiful girl, armed, and her eyes flashing hatred anew into his own—there was little for Cozy Corner Mike Cochran to do, save to allow his quick-witted lieutenant, Smut O'Malley, to take charge of matters.

It had been Smut who had "saved the fat from the fire." Smut seized the weapon from Marion Poole's hand; in a trice he had replaced one loaded chamber with the discharged cartridge from the sick girl's weapon; Smut picked up the inert girl in the hall and rushed her, fainting, back into the other apartment, from which she had only emerged a corpse.

The rest, too, had been Fate.

The accusation against Marion Poole of "assault with attempt to murder," was needful to preserve him from annihilation.

To have allowed the real facts to become public meant the crashing down of the cunning edifice of politics which he had toiled for years to erect.

So, every weapon at his command was forced into active service to save himself; not from the consequences of a premeditated crime, but from a moment of such madness bred of love that he had, time and again, cursed the day that brought him face to face with Marion Poole.

It had forced him to send Ike Black to her cell; to distort her incoherent remarks in the *Sentinel* to prejudice public opinion; to employ another lieutenant in the court-house to "hand-pick" the jury to try her; to demand of Watson that he impose a sentence of twenty years, when the verdict was reported to Cochran, by phone, from the court-house.

The same instinct of self-preservation had impelled Cozy Corner Mike, as insanely as every other circumstance of the whole dire series of events had compelled him, to plan to discredit Judge Watson by an exposure through the *Sentinel,* which he secretly owned.

Not wholly because of the act of setting aside the verdict—no, indeed!

More — far, far more — because of the flippant remark of Ike Black over the telephone: "Yep. Sprung her flat. Blew off the jail door and made a date with her."

The implication of an unworthy motive in that terse, characteristic message from the reporter, was the most maddening thing of all to Boss Cochran, sitting in the privacy of his apartment in the Catskill Arms, waiting for his "exoneration" at the hands of the jury of "twelve good men and true."

Paradoxically, it both maddened and, in one way, it soothed him, to know that another than he, Cozy Corner Mike, politician and despiser of "the sex," had fallen before the all-conquering beauty of face and soul of Marion Poole.

"For whatever reason he says he had for setting aside the verdict, it must 'a' been that," Cozy Corner Mike assured himself, while waiting for the arrival of the recalcitrant Judge Watson to "explain."

The judge had tried to "explain." But he had only confirmed Cochran's suspicions.

Confronted, pointblank, by the accusation that he had other than judicial reasons for setting aside the verdict—a verdict rendered in the face of his own analysis of the evidence—the visitor had refused to deny that he "held Miss Poole in some slight esteem."

He had gone to his doom, as a judge, with his head held high.

Leaving the apartment—

As one in the midst of a bad dream, Cochran gazed dully at the silk hat the boy was holding out to him.

A moment before the bell of his apartment had rung, the boss was on the point of ringing up Judge Watson at his club or at his home. He intended to tell him "to forget it," and that "everything's all right."

Another quick, cryptic word to another telephonic number, and the "story" he had given Ike Black in the mass of papers would not only be "canned," so far as the *Sentinel* was concerned, but on the morrow the papers themselves would be redelivered to him intact, regardless of what Ike Black thought or did in the matter afterward.

Some such sentiments had actually been forming in the brain of Cozy Corner Mike Cochran just as that hall-boy had rung his apartment bell.

Now things were somehow worse involved than before.

For the life of him, Mike could not conjecture how the judge's hat came to be in the hall.

He turned to the boy: "He wore it when he come up here?" he demanded.

"Yassah!"

"Well, didn't he wear it when he went out, or did he go out bareheaded?"

"Why," said the boy, with a perplexity matching his own, "he hain't done gone out at all, sah. I thought he was still up heah wif you-all. Nobody come up to dis floor since de jedge come in, 'ceptin' that air newspaperman dat done gone out about twenty minutes ago, sah. Dat's why I come to you-all's door wif dis yere hat—I thought de judge was still in heah, sah!"

CHAPTER VII.

OUTSIDE CATSKILL ARMS.

COURT OFFICER WARD, who had been waiting for some time in the shrubbery of the parkway across the boulevard from the Catskill Arms, saw Ike Black enter that apartment-house while waiting for the figure of Judge Archibald Watson to emerge from it.

The first was of no importance to Officer Ward.

The second incident — the emerging of his honor—was of paramount importance to Ward.

Hence that worthy public official was vaguely uneasy when the second incident failed utterly to take place after a reasonable time.

According to the prearranged signal—that of Cozy Corner Mike's raising the shade when Judge Archibald arrived and lowering it again when his honor left the boss's apartment—the judge should ere now have come out again, as Ward had undeniably seen him go in.

Minute after minute passed by, and still his honor failed to emerge. And with the flight of each successive minute, the uneasiness of Court Officer Ward increased visibly.

That is, it would have been visible to any chance observer—the same as the features of one Joe Bradish would have been visible to any chance observer who might have wandered into an alley back of the chambers of his honor and into the L-like space jutting out from a side wall, where the huddled body still lay beside a black bag.

There were, however, no "chance observers" of Officer Ward, for the very good reason that Ward took no chances on being observed.

His uneasiness arose from within.

Nominally, he was a free agent as well as an officer of the court clothed with police powers. The wisps of fog dripping down among the trees, but stopping just short of actual rain; the sough of the wind mournfully through their denuded branches; the bleak perspective of the park and the twinkling lights of the city, all attested the fact that Court Officer Ward was as undeniably at large as Marion Poole had found herself in the open air, following the astounding dénouement of her trial and verdict only a few short hours before.

And in that lay the growing restiveness of Officer Ward.

He wanted to remain at large — as ardently as Marion Poole or any other innocent or guilty person caught in the strong mesh of the law.

Time was, not so long ago, when Officer Ward, under another name, had been one of a file of zebra-clad men moving in rhythmic procession like a huge serpent across the yard of the State prison.

Bleak, frowning walls frowned down upon him—walls not so tall as those of the Catskill Arms, which he still scanned avidly, but far more secure and far less elegant within.

Quite unwillingly Mr. Ward, *alias* Somebody Else, had been given a long-term lease of one of the apartments in that forbidding and noxious place, together with such conveniences as electric lights which never went out and attendants who overlooked nothing that would contribute to his secure keeping, while they turned a deaf ear and callous countenance to things that would ameliorate his condition.

From this apartment he had been released through the good offices of Cozy Corner Mike Cochran; by and through the abundant generosity of that lessee of the luxurious apartment across the street he had also been provided with remunerative employment; and quite recently, owing to the same all-powerful influence,

Ward had been transferred from his post as a patrolman in an obscure precinct in one of the newer portions of the city, as personal attendant to his honor at the opening of the trial of Marion Poole, some four days before.

Nominally, he was quite free; actually, he was paroled "on good behavior." The term was more elastic than he had ever imagined it could be; and the principal requirement to being "good" was to stand well in the eyes of his benefactor, Cozy Corner Mike.

Mike had the reputation of being "hard but square."

One serious mistake, however innocent of wrong intention, might suffice to see Court Officer Ward stripped of his regimentals, and back in the selfsame prison wherein Marion Poole had been so nearly immured—back in the narrow, fetid cell, back to the frightful food, back to the irksome prison routine — for the balance of the twenty years which hung over him.

So far, he reflected, he had done all that was required of him.

And Ward had no intention whatever of allowing the Hon. Archibald Watson or any other person, civilian or otherwise, to be the means, directly or indirectly, of his again returning to that prison.

He was so mystified by the non-appearance of the judge that he was on the point of going over to the apartment to make inquiry of the hall-boy when he descried Ike Black emerging from the portals of the place, and looking around for a vehicle apparently.

He could not be mistaken. The hat alone was enough to identify Ike, as well as the gray rain-coat which he wore, turned up around the collar indoors or out. Ike had several idiosyncracies of personal attire and demeanor. He invariably wore a flat-brimmed fedora, creased in at the top, crushed in slightly at both sides, with the front bent sharply down across the bridge of his nose.

From this awning effect, Ike permitted his oblique and furtive, but no less keen, observation to issue.

From side to side his eyes were darting even now.

Not seeing any taxi in front of the Catskill Arms, Ike whipped out a cigarette, lighted it, puffed out a cloud of smoke; then, allowing the same to hang pendent from his nether lip, he stepped briskly across to where Ward was waiting in the shadows of the shrubbery for the judge.

"Hey!" hissed the court officer, when the reporter's figure was abreast of his own in the shadows of a big elm. "Hey, Ike! Seen anything of Judge Archibald over there?"

The reporter's figure leaped sidewise at the sudden sound of his name, then stiffened as he peered among the trees.

"Who is it?" he demanded.

"Why, it's me—Ward! I been waiting here for the judge. Did you see him?"

"Aw!" grunted the reporter, coming closer. "Sure I seen him. Have a drink?" He proffered a flask.

"Nix. Why don't the judge come out?"

"Aw! They're having some sort of a fight up there." The other jerked a thumb toward the apartment, whose lights were easily visible through the shades. "Say; the chief wants Smut. Where's Smut?"

"He went up-town somewhere. Why don't you look him up?"

"Too busy." The flask was at the other's lips. "Well, the chief wants Smut. Said if I saw him to tell him that he's to come in right away. Better have a drink. It's a damp night."

Ward waved away the flask the second time.

The other moved unsteadily toward the lone taxi, which Ward had previously ensconced a little farther along the side of the deserted park.

"Hey! Don't take that," admonished Ward.

"Got to. Late now," replied the belated one, flinging open the door with the words.

"But I planted it there—for another feller," protested Ward, checking himself just as he was about to utter for whom. Decidedly, after his past experience, with one man "squealing" on him and, as a result, getting him a long "bit," Court Officer Ward, *alias* Somebody Else, was not

going to trust any reporter with more than was necessary to carry his point.

"Well," leered the other, closing the door as he spoke, "he won't be over here for quite a while. The boss is out for his scalp. You know that—you oughta know it, after what come off in court. And I've got part of the goods right here. Now the boss wants Smut," he reiterated in a maudlin manner, as he waved the package of papers. "Said if I seen Smut to send him right—"

Ward was both angry and relieved when the lurching vehicle carried the balance of the sentence out of ear-shot.

Angry at the disregard of his wishes, although, for that matter, as he reflected, there was no reason why a half-intoxicated reporter should not hire any taxi, even the handiest, when late with his work; relieved that his own eyes had not tricked him, and that Judge Archibald was still, as he had just been told, with "the chief"; and more than pleased at the prospect of furthering the chief's commands by informing Smut O'Malley, the moment he could get in touch with that worthy, of the fact that Cozy Corner Mike Cochran desired his presence at his apartment without delay.

All of which, Officer Ward firmly believed, as well as he ardently hoped, would go down to his credit on the books under the somewhat elastic term of "good behavior," thereby enabling a good report of him to go to the parole board, and, in due time, procure for him permission to still enjoy the blessings of liberty and the pursuit of happiness guaranteed to other citizens of the commonwealth.

To maintain the first and pursue the second Officer Ward was willing to go far—quite far.

Just how far it was fortunate for his honor that he did not know; for Ward prided himself on his ability to deceive without the deception being suspected by the one to be misled; and the only exception he made was with Cozy Corner Mike, with whom he had played as a boy.

To Mike, Ward was as transparent as glass.

That was why Mike chose Ward to keep watch on his honor and the other court officials during the trial of Marion Poole; that was why Ward immediately reported to Smut O'Malley, Mike's chief political lieutenant, following the rendering of the jury's verdict, and his own notification of his honor in chambers; that was why he reported everything else, including the presence of one Joe Bradish in the court-room, day after day.

Ward spotted Bradish because he had seen Bradish watching him with the same curious intentness that the lover of Marion Poole scanned everything else in the court-room; a scrutiny so marked that it aroused the suspicions of the court officer.

But O'Malley, after listening to Ward's report, had looked up Bradish and contemptuously reported Bradish, in turn, to Cozy Corner Mike and Ward as "a ham out of work," and also "stuck on the Jane."

This partially stilled the suspicions of Court Officer Ward, but not entirely so; for he had a vague feeling that he had seen Bradish before—and even heard the name.

But, try as he would, Ward could not place this persistent feeling with any definiteness.

Since he had spent twelve long, wearying, soul-blighting months in the State's strong-box for criminals, the function of memory, with Court Officer Ward, alias Somebody Else, had undergone a marked impairment.

Reflection on the past invariably led his thoughts to the doors of the hateful prison; on the present and future, to ways and means of avoiding a return to the same place.

So, Court Officer Ward did not seek to borrow further trouble. He had plenty to worry about besides a ham out of work, whether or not he was stuck on the Jane, or stuck on a million other Janes.

He had noticed, however, the vacancy in the chair which Bradish usually occupied when Marion Poole had been brought in that night to hear the jury's verdict; he had noticed it because another had been occupying it and had been requested by a court bailiff to take a seat further back.

Ward shrewdly guessed that this particular bailiff had received a small but ample gratuity from Bradish to reserve that particular seat for the actor every day of the trial. And in this he was right. It was only one of many forms of petty graft, technically known as "sugar," in the circle of officials.

But that, too, was none of Ward's business.

His business, moreover, had received an unexpected stimulus in the short, sharp command in the chief's own voice, on the wire, following the setting aside of the verdict.

He had been told to "stand with Smut" and see to it that his honor left that court-house to come directly to Cozy Corner Mike's. And in this matter, as in all others, Court Officer Ward had scrupulously obeyed the instructions of his benefactor and boyhood friend.

He was still obeying them to the best of his ability.

But he could not induce the Hon. Archibald Watson a second time to enter the same taxicab which had previously been loitering in front of the court-house for the judge's use alone; not, at least, until his honor emerged from the Catskill Arms; and not, at least again, until that identical taxi had returned from taking Ike Black up to the *Sentinel* office.

There was nothing to do, therefore, but continue his lonely vigil out there in the damp, chilling night. However, there were places less to be preferred—his cell had been both damp and chilly—to say nothing of being much smaller.

So, Court Officer Ward continued to pace back and forth in the shadows, but not once in the interim before that same taxi's return did he unglue his watchful, beady eyes from the entrance to the Catskill Arms.

He breathed more freely when he heard some gas-propelled vehicle approaching. It was coming through the park. It must be the same one, otherwise it would take the broader, better lighted and better paved boulevard which bordered it.

The boulevard had been put through by Cozy Corner Mike over the protests of many indignant taxpayers. But they had long forgotten to be indignant. The boulevard was a beautiful avenue, one of the show-places of the town; and the fact that it enhanced the patronage of the Catskill Arms some five hundred per cent was a thing no taxpayer ever "beefed about," any more than they had ever beefed about the fact that Cozy Corner Mike had wrung a three-year lease of an apartment, free of charge, from the owners of the otherwise rather-out-of-the-way Catskill Arms before consenting to have the measure pass the city council.

This fact, as well as many others of like character, were unknown to the taxpayers as well as to Court Officer Ward. He only knew that, luckily for him, when he was alias Somebody-Else that Mike had come to his rescue; and that he was glad to be of any and all service to Mike, on any and all occasions.

Having killed the man who had squealed on him for a certain job to prevent his testifying in court against him, Court Officer Ward was prepared to go far—quite far—to prevent his return to the State prison.

That was why he had pulled his "smoke wagon" in the private corridor of the court-house. Mike had told him to leave nothing undone to persuade Judge Watson to "come down to see me, without delay."

So, with a consciousness of duty well done, under somewhat trying circumstances, Ward turned to make sure that it was the same taxi which he had kept waiting for the especial service of Judge Watson when that worthy should emerge from the Catskill Arms, and seek ways and means of leaving that vicinity.

That, by the way, was a little innovation of Ward's own devising—to make sure where his honor went next, after leaving Cozy Corner Mike's. He took a pardonable pride in the originality of the idea—it would serve to show that he was thoroughly devoted to his benefactor and boyhood friend, and even took the initiative in some matters wherein the unexpected happened.

The unexpected had certainly happened that night when Judge Watson had so tersely set aside the verdict of the twelve

good men and true; and had followed this unprecedented and astonishing behavior by calling Marion Poole to the bench for a whispered word ere she left the court-room.

Ward agreed with Ike Black's coarse, cynical deduction about "the date." That was the reason he had kept the same taxi handy. It was driven by Three-Fingered Jack Holt, an old friend of Ward's. And if the date was kept, Ward wanted to "have somethin' on the judge" with which to further establish himself more securely in the good graces of Cozy Corner Mike.

It was Three-Fingered Jack himself who drew up.

His "flag," however, was "down," showing the taxi had another occupant.

Ward stepped over to investigate. It was Smut O'Malley.

The lieutenant's dour countenance was livid as he left the vehicle.

"What's the matter, Smut?" asked Ward.

O'Malley drew him deeper into the shadows before replying.

Out of ear-shot of Holt, disregarding the habitual reticence of his manner of going about things, O'Malley blurted:

"Matter? Well, hell's tapped, Ward."

"How?" echoed the other.

"Well, I went up-town, as I told you, to see there wasn't no more backfirin' on this Poole case," snarled O'Malley in a whisper. "Remember?"

"Sure, I remember. And it was a good idee, after the judge turnin' her up the way he did to-night."

"An idee of my own," supplemented O'Malley truculently.

"Sure. I give you all the credit in the world. But what of it?"

O'Malley did not immediately reply.

Instead, he peered across at the apartment of Cozy Corner Mike, and demanded: "Has that blankety-blank-blank-blank judge come out yet?"

"No. I been on the job every minute, waitin' fer him. How'd you come to catch Holt's car?"

"I seen Mike lamning fer the office of the *Sentinel*. Holt was turnin' around. I hopped in and beat it back—fer a chat with you."

"With me?"

"Yep. Ward, we gotta croak that double-dealin' blankety-blank judge."

Ward paled. But his voice was firm.

"I thought there'd been a blow-off. What is it, Smut?"

"I just come from the hotel. They told me down there that Judge Watson was in to see that girl, before she kicked off this afternoon. He took her dyin' deposition. They heard him through the crack in the door."

Ward was mute.

"The double-dealin' blankety-blank put one over on us," continued Smut, cursing vehemently. "I see now why he turned down the chief and turned up the Jane. I couldn't make it, couldn't make it at all, when he done it," continued O'Malley more plaintively. "But he fell for her—the same as the chief fell for her. If it hadn't been for me, by now they'd had the big fellow in the hoosegow in place of the dame. And to think of all this mess on account of a skirt! Well, let's go over. I see Mike walkin' up and down the room—his shadow's been at the windy three times since I come in sight of the place. Are you sure the judge's with him?"

"Ike said he was when he come out. The judge didn't come out before or since. I been right on the job every minit. If he'd come out, I'd a mugged him. I planted this cab of Holt's here, instead of over yonder, to keep a line on him. He's got a date with that Jane. If he keeps it we got somethin' on him, ain't we?"

"He'll never keep it—not if he's over there," growled Smut. "We got nothin' on him like what he's got on us—nothin' at all. He's got the dyin' deposition of that sick girl, Ward. That let's the Poole girl out. He went down and got it this afternoon while the jury was out—"

"Nix. He was in chambers all of the time I was watchin'."

Ward's voice thrilled with pardonable pride. There was something in the nature of a mix-up here. But not exactly what Smut had intimated, of that Ward was as sure as he was that they were now conferring in the shadows.

"Don't lie," snarled Smut.

"I hain't lyin'," replied Ward candidly. "I say the judge was in his chambers from the time he charged the jury at one o'clock until they come in, about seven-thirty or quarter to eight. Didn't I see him go in? Didn't I call on him, once to give him a special delivery letter I signed for with my own hands? Didn't I call him when the jury reported it had agreed?"

"But where was he all the rest of the time?"

"In chambers, I tell you."

"You couldn't look through the door."

"Believe me, Smut, I wasn't takin' no chances on that bird. The chief tipped me off what to do. And I done it. I was right at the door leadin' into the court-room from his private hall, or inside that hall, all the time. I know what I'm talkin' about—you don't."

"Aw I don't, eh?" belligerently demanded the other. "Now, listen, you. We ain't got no time to argue—over nothin'. That same duck was down to the hotel this afternoon, I'm tellin' you. They didn't want to let him in. He walked in—regardless—past Tommy the Turk. And Tommy beat it. He was lookin' high 'nd low fer me. Where was I? Over in the little room of the court-house marked 'Private,' smokin' a cigar, waitin' fer the verdict. You know that, don't you?"

"Nobody says you wasn't there, But—"

"Tommy the Turk couldn't locate me. He went back to the hotel. The girl upstairs was dead when he got back. Tommy waited a little, then he called the coroner, 'nd she was carried over to the morgue."

"I knew that this afternoon at three o'clock," said Ward, with an impatient gesture. "Everybody knew that she was dead. That lets everybody out—don't it?"

O'Malley seemed to lose his nerve completely.

He chanted soft but deep curses with all the fervor of one intoning prayers for several seconds.

"It lets us in—all of us," he muttered, with a lash to his words like the sting of a scorpion. "Do you know what a dyin' deposition means? It means that it goes—goes ahead of anybody that swears the other way. The chief swore the other way—so did Tommy the Turk—so did all the rest of them, in this Poole case. Now, with that deposition taken, do you wonder that the double-dealin' blankety-blank judge thinks he's got us all? He don't just think it, either—he knows it. Good God—the nerve of him. And with Mike puttin' him on the bench not three months ago!"

Ward, stupefied at the real significance of this latest disclosure, came partially back to former sights and scenes at the reference to the chief. That gentleman occupied a position as preeminent in Ward's conscious or subconscious thought process as Mike did in all matters political in city and State.

"That reminds me," said Ward; "the chief wants to see you about somethin' right away."

"Who says so?"

"Ike Black told me, when he come out, before he stole this benzin-buggy 'nd beat it back to his paper."

O'Malley peered through the trees.

"He hain't been at the window fer a minute or so," said he.

Ward took a long breath.

He very much hated to be present when this frightful bit of news was broken to Cozy Corner Mike Cochran, on top of his previous disappointments of the evening. The chief was "square, but hard." What if he determined to hold Ward responsible for Judge Archibald's alleged visit to the hotel?

In that case, what became of the "good conduct" upon and by virtue of which Ward was permitted to remain at large?

As they crossed the street the court officer vainly tried to alibi himself out of a situation wherein he felt he was not at all at fault.

"Maybe Tommy the Turk got mixed up," he hazarded. "His lamps ain't none too good, anyway. Mebbe—"

"Mebbe Tommy don't know the judge who hung up a suspended sentence on him, when Mike asked him to do it, of eleven months, twenty-nine days, and fifteen hundred dollars fine, when he was caught red-handed carryin' out stuff from the biggest

department-store in this burg, after he took a plea of guilty to grand larceny in the second, only a week before this blow-off with the Poole woman," jeered Smut. "And all on account of Mike comin' to his rescue, the same as he's allus tryin' to take care of all his friends," he pointedly returned. "If his friends took as good care of him—"

They were too near the hallway of the Catskill Arms for Smut to jeopardize his own reputation for reticence by further audible remarks.

As a matter of fact, he had said more to Ward in the last ten minutes than he had in the last ten months, since Ward had "come back from the hoosegow." That sudden loquacity, as well as his pallor, and the intent, burning gaze Smut O'Malley cast around the ornate foyer of the Catskill Arms, the instant the twain came into the hall, attested the nature of the deadly dilemma into which they had all fallen.

For the chief was the keystone of the arch.

Once allow that keystone to be dislodged or even loosened, and down would come the whole bridge which had thus far carried Ward safely over the charge of murder and released him after a conviction for manslaughter from serving the entire sentence of twenty years at hard labor, which had been imposed on his conviction.

The foyer was empty.

The night custodian of the phone and elevator was up above, somewhere, as the absence of the elevator attested.

Smut O'Malley hesitated not at all.

He turned to the stairs.

Cozy Corner Mike's apartment was on the seventh floor.

Ward was at the other's heels.

If any apartment door above them opened and the elevator descended, Ward determined to abandon the stairs and intercept the car at one of the intervening lower landings, lest Judge Watson elude him, even then.

As the stairs paralleled the elevator shaft this was a simple thing to achieve, once they heard the machinery started.

They crept upward, tiptoing. The absence of the hallman made their errand much simpler than it might have been had the custodian been at the desk on their entrance. As it was somewhat after midnight he was up aloft somewhere.

The halls likewise were both deserted and partially darkened.

This, too, made their errand more nefariously certain than it otherwise could have been. For His Honor Archibald Watson was also somewhere in the Catskill Arms, of that both men were sure. Both had seen him enter it, both had seen Cozy Corner Mike signal the arrival of the judge's person in the apartment itself. The judge had not come out. Ward had watched and was certain of it. Even Ike Black had corroborated the circumstance.

Therefore he was within. And, if within, undoubtedly upon his person was the same deposition which Tommy the Turk had told Smut O'Malley that Judge Watson had obtained that afternoon from a woman of the slums—just prior to her demise.

They padded noiselessly around the corner of the elevator on the seventh floor. The elevator was there, the door open. Farther down the corridor stood the colored boy who was holding up before their startled chief himself a silk hat, into which he was peering with perplexed eyes.

CHAPTER VIII.

PROTEUS REVEALS HIMSELF.

HIS HONOR ARCHIBALD WATSON sat somewhat weakly in a chair at the desk in his chambers. Perched on the opposite side of the desk, with his feet dangling insolently down, regardless of his proximity to the man looking across at him with dazed eyes that scarcely comprehended how he came to be there, was a figure in a gray raincoat, a flat-brimmed fedora hat, with its front edge turned sharply down over the bridge of his nose, and a pair of furtive eyes gleaming above a thin-lipped, cynical mouth, from which depended a smoldering cigarette.

"What's the matter, judge?" flippantly demanded the other man. "You don't look as if you understood me. And your face is all daubed up—wait a minute!"

He reached forward, wiping the other's

features not unkindly with a linen handkerchief, which he dropped to the desk as he concluded.

"Looks like blood and whitewash—but it ain't either," continued the speaker. "Now, are you ready to listen to what I have to say?"

His honor nodded, but with less of the crisp, emphatic manner that usually characterized his decisions, in court or out of it. Likewise he did not complacently pat his stomach with his neatly manicured hands, a habit that was almost as integral a part of himself as his hands themselves. They lay listlessly in his lap, save when he raised one of them now and again to press his brow.

"What time is it?" he managed to ask.

The other laughed coarsely.

"Time enough for you to come out of that trance you've been in," said he offensively. "I've come in here to do you a favor—a big favor. You sit there as stupid as if you'd been hittin' the pipe. Come out of it and lissen: Do you know what Cozy Corner Mike Cochran's done to you to-night?"

"To-night—what time is it?" reiterated Judge Watson.

"It's almost one o'clock in the morning. Now, the *Sentinel* goes to press in just one-half hour—they're holding the forms right now, waiting for me. Get that, judge?"

He thrust his face more offensively than ever toward that of the judge.

The latter bridled.

Dignity had ever been a strong point with him. The arrogant act roused in him a sense of repugnance, even now; although, for some reason not yet clear, his ideas were still very cloudy, his head ached, and his neck throbbed painfully.

"Well," said he, trying to speak indifferently, "I'm not interested in the *Sentinel*."

"Is that so?" jeered the man on the desk, pausing to relight the now extinguished cigarette.

Its odor was very distasteful to the judge.

He half turned to glance at the back of the room, where a window was raised a little way. Through it came, at times, wisps of gray fog, tenuous and wraithlike.

"You'll be mighty interested," went on the other with a sneer, "if the *Sentinel* prints the story that Mike give me to-night. How do you think you'll stand, as a judge—or even as a plain citizen, for instance—when that newspaper prints the facsimile minutes of a certain meeting of a certain real-estate company, with the real list of its board of directors and stockholders—not the dummies—the real ones? The same company that owns, among other properties, the hotel where this Poole woman you've had on trial was framed-up by a lot of scum—framed up to cover what Mike Cochran didn't dare to face—the consequences of his attempt to assault an unprotected girl, who was devoting her life and her slender income to aiding the soiled doves of that nest, whose profits helped to build that new house you're puttin' up over on Montezuma Avenue—hey?"

Judge Watson, who at the beginning of the remarks had seemed rather pale, had grown very red and then pale again.

"It's a lie," said he feebly.

"Is it?" echoed the speaker. "Tell that to Sweeney. Or to the district attorney. Mike's thrown you down. He threw you down on account of your taking up the Poole woman—"

"I don't understand you."

The mocking smile on the other's face was more and more offensive.

"Alibi, eh?" he continued. "Well, Ike Black, of the *Sentinel*, as well as every other reporter in town, understood quite well. You came out of chambers, you went on the bench, you listened to the jury's verdict—guilty, as charged in the indictment—you set it aside, and then you called the girl to the bench and whispered to her, before she went out on her own bail, with her counsel.

"That isn't all," he continued remorselessly. "You went from your chambers to a taxicab, drove to Mike's place, bawled him out; meanwhile our paper was trying to locate you, and so was every other paper in town. You weren't at your club nor your home; you disappeared from the Catskill

Arms completely. I came into that place just as you were coming out.

"Where you went no one knows—but you. Where did you go? The whole town knows you turned Marion Poole out, after a verdict of guilty, according to your own charge to the jury. That's what got Mike sore—that and your cocky way with him, after you went down to his apartment. You can't deny you did these things—a court-room full of people saw and heard you set a verdict aside, and Court Officer Ward and Smut O'Malley followed you down to Mike's place in another taxi. But, from there, they lost you. They're looking high and low for you right now. What's the answer, with you sitting here in your chambers at one o'clock in the morning? Did the Jane disappoint you?"

Had he been able, Judge Watson would have smitten the sneering figure opposite to the floor. As it was, he tried to annihilate him by a look.

The fellow laughed contemptuously.

Ike Black, as Watson knew, had long borne a reputation as one who respected nothing and no one. Innocence he believed a mask for sinister designs; dignity was merely a cloak for hypocrisy to masquerade behind.

His frightful accusations left the Hon. Archibald Watson almost as numb and cold as he had been a few moments before, when waking at his desk in response to repeated utterances of his name, he had found the figure of the *Sentinel* man bending over him.

Just what had transpired the judge was completely at a loss to say. He had a vague recollection of receiving a certain document and of reading it; but, as it purported to be only a copy and was unsigned, he—and here the hiatus in his usually methodical mind began and continued until the present moment—or a very few moments before the present moment.

While he now comprehended clearly the things which the other occupant of his chambers had declared to have transpired in the interim, he could not credit it at all. He tried again and again to clear the mists that had clouded his brain.

Mechanically he reached toward where he had laid down the alleged deposition which had come to him by special delivery that afternoon, after he had charged the jury in the Marion Poole case. It was not in sight.

The keen-eyed, watching fellow, still perched insolently on the far side of his desk, laughed coarsely at the movement.

"You won't find it," said he with another leer, "any more than Cozy Corner Mike Cochran can produce the original minutes of that real-estate company from his safe, where he kept 'em for two years. No use, judge. You'd better make terms. Get me? You'd better make terms. Or I'm going out of here—and I won't come back. As Cozy Corner Mike told you to your face to-night down in the Catskill Arms, you're through—unless—"

"I beg your pardon," said Judge Watson suavely, "but there is some mistake in this, you know."

"You can bet your sweet life there's a mistake," gloated the other. "But I ain't made it. Neither has Mike. He never makes mistakes. The nearest he ever come to making a mistake was when you went on the bench. You made one great big mistake to-night when you didn't come across and give that Jane the twenty years he asked you to give her, instead of turning her loose that way."

Judge Watson started to rise.

"Your remarks, sir, are perfectly incomprehensible."

"No," sneered the other, "the soap won't slip you across this time, judge. You're wide open. Mike's passed over the documents. He knows now, although he didn't then, why you turned her up. You had the deposition that you took from the poor kid that died this afternoon down in that hotel you owned—"

"Are you mad, sir?"

"No, my nut's not even slightly wormy, judge. Now, don't try to say anything you might be sorry for later on. You're Judge Watson. I know it. What of it? I'm only a newspaperman—hey? But, tomorrow, you may be on your way to making little ones out of big ones—just like the other boobs. But I won't be. I've got that document that Cozy Corner Mike

gave me to-night down in his apartment. There's your phone. If you doubt that Mike gave you the hook to-night, you don't have to move out of your chair to find out whether or not I'm lying to you. Just take off the hook, call up Central—they work nights. Ask for Marlowe, one-two-six-five, private wire, and ask him whether or not this is right. Just a minute—don't tell him I'm here—if you want to stand right with me. You and me'll get together, judge, all right, all right. Mike's give you the double-cross—let's give him the triple-cross. Ain't he got it comin' to him?"

His Honor Archibald Watson recovered at this point sufficiently to pat his stomach with a pair of neatly manicured hands—a sure sign with him of some small accession of normality.

Then he reached for the receiver.

When Marion Poole woke from her nap in the apartment of Joe Bradish, the hands of the little clock on the mantle pointed to twelve-thirty.

She looked around the apartment.

Memory came floating back, at first hideous, then alluring.

It was true, then.

She had not dreamed of a miracle.

Judge Watson had been merciful. She was free—in Joe's apartment—the place to which Judge Watson had bidden her come.

But where was Joe?

Before the question could be answered she heard a stealthy step on the stairs.

With nerves taut from her long, cruel ordeal, and growing tauter with the memory of her absent lover, Marion grew so apprehensive at the sound of that stealthy footstep that she reached quickly for the only light burning in the room, and turned it out.

The step outside came nearer. It was not at all like Joe's quick, emphatic walk. It was the approach of some one down the hall who did not wish to rouse any one in the building. Some one who, she concluded with a throb of new but no less poignant alarm, who had no right to be there.

The door from the main corridor to the tiny hall leading into Joe's suite was shrouded in some sort of chints—a dainty covering, furnishing at once ornamentation to the interior of the entrance, and preventing a glance into the private hall from the main corridor.

She could see into the main corridor through the clear window of the door. Marion drew aside the curtain ever so slightly and peered out. The stealthy footstep continued. It paused, at last, directly in front of her. One glance sufficed.

The fedora hat, with its flat brim, turned straight down in front; the gray raincoat, buttoned up tightly to the chin, and the collar turned up besides, to say nothing of the smoldering cigarette dangling from the nether lip of the individual—all were the very same as when Marion had met Ike Black, the thin-lipped, cynical-faced reporter in the woman's prison shortly after her first arrest, and sobbed out the story of her innocence.

She knew she could not be mistaken.

The figure in the hall stopped directly in front of her. Owing to the system of overhead lighting from the solitary lamp in the corridor, she could see without being seen.

He was fitting a key to the lock of the apartment where she was waiting the return of her lover.

Appalled at the sheer, sublimated frightfulness of a thousand nameless conjectures which this totally unexpected act conjured up in her teeming, overwrought brain in an instant, Marion stood transfixed.

She was so void of volition that she could not even rush to the telephone and summon her counsel, Byron Bartnett, in the absence of Joe, or even notify Central of the intruder.

She seemed turned to stone as the door swung inward and then clicked back, as the figure stepped inside and replaced the keys.

His furtive eyes met her terrified ones. His lips moved.

"'The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau,'" quoted Joe Bradish. "Marion, dear, I know I'm dreadfully late. And I must go out again, at once. Take these."

He thrust a packet of papers into her limp, unresisting hands.

"Sh!" he warned. "If I'm not back by half past one o'clock, call up Byron Bartnett, and tell him to come here, at once, and give them to him. Don't try to read them, dear. Don't ask questions. You're free. I'll be back. If I don't get back, ask Byron Bartnett to read the papers, at once, and to call on Judge Watson in the morning."

Before she could realize it, the door had opened and closed.

Save for the packet of papers in her hands, Marion Poole could scarcely credit the fact that she had seen Joe Bradish, at all.

Simultaneously, at the Catskill Arms, Cozy Corner Mike Cochran raged at the colored boy who had brought him the hat:

"Why, you blankety-blank little fool, why didn't you tell us before that you found Judge Watson's hat on the floor above this. Then, we might have saved a lotta time. Lead the way—and hurry."

The trembling darky obeyed.

Cozy Corner Mike at his heels, he walked to the elevator. Behind the boss trudged Court Officer Ward, and the dour-faced O'Malley.

They searched the floor for a trace of the missing judge, but without avail. There were several empty linen closets, all unlocked. The elevator-boy, under the waspish demands of the boss, even roused the tenants.

No sign of Judge Archibald Watson.

Then the darky scratched his head again.

"I mus' be wrong, boss," said he candidly. "It was on the flohr below the one where you-all lives, 'stead of de flohr above, dat I done found dis yere hat."

Mike paled. "Can youse beat thot?" he queried of O'Malley, lapsing into a brogue long unused. "Well, you imp of hell, get us down there, quick. Another twenty minutes gone—"

"'Scuse me, boss. I'se only de night elevator-man. I ain't s'posed to check no hats in dis yere place!"

Barely had they reached the lower floor when a muffled beating from one of the linen closets made the darky turn gray.

"Foh de Lawd's sake—" he gasped.

Court Officer Ward glanced significantly at Smut O'Malley.

Then he stepped resolutely toward the sound of the muffled thumping, reached quietly for the spring-catch on the door, and opened it without hesitation.

Just how he should manage his honor, Archibald Watson, was not exactly clear in the mind of Ward at the instant he swung wide the entrance to the narrow prison-house. But he was ready to go far—quite far—even with a pop-eyed darky boy standing near.

He was saved the trouble of going very far.

Out of the orifice created by the opened door tumbled Ike Black, no longer thin-lipped and cynical, but wild-eyed and gasping—*sans* raincoat, flat-brimmed fedora—even the cigarette.

"Foh de Lawd's sake," began the negro again.

"Come up to my room, you drunken fool!" snarled Cozy Corner Mike. "What 'n hell do you mean by lockin' yourself into a linen closet?"

"Drunk? Who's drunk?" exploded the reporter. "Here I'm comin' along the hall leadin' to your apartment, nice and peaceable, and all of a sudden—"

"Git out!" The boss's tone was most sardonic. "Why, you're on the floor below; you didn't go down from my floor, at all. You walked into that closet and locked yourself in—"

"'Scuse me, boss," again interpolated the darky; "but I done took dis yere gemmen up to you-all's apahtment on de seventh flohr, and den I done took him down agen to de office—not twenty minits afore I done found dis yere hat."

"You took me up, but you didn't take me down." Ike Black's haggard face testified to the cruel ordeal he had endured in the interim.

"Somebody's loony!" snarled Mike. "Is it me? What did you do with the papers I give you?" he demanded of the reporter.

"Papers?" queried that still gasping fellow. "Why, I haven't even seen you to get any papers. If any one's loony, it ain't me."

"Do you mean to say you didn't come down to the ground floor, come out of this building, cross the street, offer me a drink, tell me that the chief wanted to see Smut right away, and then wave a bundle of papers at me and drive off in a benzin buggy with Three-Fingered Jack Holt?" demanded Ward, thrusting himself into the group.

"Certainly not!" Black's face was a study in chagrin and bewilderment. Cozy Corner Mike's was a mirror, reflecting the reporter's in all save the indubitable difference of feature with which each was endowed at birth.

O'Malley took his turn, quite forgetting his taciturnity in his newest fears.

"Lissen, Ike: Didn't I see you goin' into the *Sentinel* office, up-town, about three-quarters of an hour ago, after you'd got out of Holt's cab, and just as he was turning it around?"

"You might have seen my astral body—I was locked in there," snarled Black. "I tried to tell you—"

"Whisht!" interposed Cozy Corner Mike. "I think my phone's ringin', and I mind I left me door open. Up wid all of yez. We'll talk things over in my apartment."

He seized the receiver as they grouped around the table, exchanging mutual glances of incredulity, distrust, and fear.

"Who is speakin'? Ah! Good evenin', yer honor. Yes. This is Mr. Cochran, speakin'. Ah! 'Twas kind of ye to call me up. A little late, though. I was thryin' to get ye at yer club. Oh, ye've been in chambers, all the evenin'?"

Cochran's face grew red until it seemed as if the gorged veins beneath his mane of hair on his forehead would burst and deluge his Shetland-pony forelock a brilliant crimson.

Then it paled until death itself could not have set a more waxy seal upon it.

But he merely said: "All right, judge—immediately," as he hung up the receiver and turned a corrosive eye on the cowering form of Court Officer Ward.

"The lost judge is found," said Mike huskily. "I don't know what the divil's been goin' on to-night. But, I'm goin' to find out—right now. Watson's sittin' up there in his chambers. He says he's been sick all the evening. He ain't seen nobody. He don't know nothin'. And, begorra—he says that Ike Black told him a few minutes ago that I was out to double-cross him on account of th' Poole case. How c'n thot be when the three of us has just let him out of a closet on the floor below this apartment?"

Judge Watson hung up the receiver with a cat-and-canary smile.

He turned to the figure on the desk.

"Well, you heard what I said to Mike, didn't you?" he asked.

"I did. As well as what you said to Mike earlier this evening. It's no use, Judge Watson. If Mike makes up with you, to save his skin, that don't let you out. You've defiled your ermine. You've plotted the ruin of an innocent young woman, beautiful, cultured, all that any girl ought to be—and was—to pay a political debt. Why, you even sat right here in this very room, to-night, after the jury's verdict was announced, and you were given your orders over the telephone. Mike told you he wanted you to sentence the girl to twenty years—the girl who resisted his importunities, when trapped in a room in a disreputable hotel, where she had gone on an errand of mercy.

"You dare not deny it!" vehemently reasserted the figure, leaping suddenly to the floor, and shaking an accusatory finger in the face of the pallid, shrinking man in the chair.

"You cannot deny it, any more than Cozy Corner Mike Cochran could prevent the dying confession of the poor creature who tried to atone for her life of sorrow and shame by shooting at Mike, herself, in order to protect Marion Poole; and afterward was kept a prisoner until noon of yesterday—for it is now a new day—until, in a coma which resembled death, she was abandoned by Smut O'Malley, who had been assigned by Mike to guard her, lest she reveal the truth.

"You received a copy of that confession, in the form of a deposition, this afternoon by special delivery, and it was given you by Court Officer Ward, your attendant.

"You were reading it when Ward told you that the jury had agreed. You so far forgot your high office as to jest with him as to whether that verdict would be satisfactory or not, 'to the parties interested.' You sat there, when you jested with him—sat there after reading that copy of the deposition—"

"You forget," said Judge Archibald Watson, bending forward in his chair suavely, and patting the desk with his neatly manicured hands, "that it was only a copy, unsigned, and, as such—"

"Did you hope to receive the original?" sardonically queried the figure in the flat-brimmed hat and gray raincoat.

Watson flushed violently and gripped the desk before him.

Then his semblance of aplomb reasserted itself.

The one word "immejeately," which Cozy Corner Mike Cochran could muster up breath to utter over the telephone, in response to his honor's suave query as to "when shall I see you again, Mr. Cochran?" was his ace in the hole in the strange, weird game which he was now playing.

A must extraordinary situation, truly, for a judge.

Yet he was playing it as desperately as any hardened and desperate gambler had ever played for his last stake—or as men had ever played for their very lives in other communities where "law and order" were unknown.

The desperateness of the situation was only matched by the truth of the hot words springing like lava from the mouth of a volcano, unless, the judge thought, with a sly smile, it was matched, as well, by the splendid audacity which the madman exhibited.

Only a few minutes and Cozy Corner Mike would be there himself. Judge Watson knew Mike Cochran too well to believe that he would come empty-handed in such a frightful emergency as confronted them both.

For, in his little scheme of things, Mike had learned, quite early in his career to eliminate the element of chance, so far as he was capable. The element of the unexpected in affairs gives zest and relish to some situations and poignant sorrow to others.

Just now Judge Watson was experiencing a certain zest in the knowledge that Mike was already *en route;* that the man before whom he was dissimulating—the man who looked like Ike Black, and who had seemed to be Ike Black—did not know that Mike was coming; for Judge Watson had tricked him by making a harmless, suave inquiry over the phone—and had not repeated the hectic, monosyllabic reply "immejeately!"

On the whole, there was more than mere zest in such a situation. Judge Watson keenly relished the situation as well. The fellow masquerading as Ike Black had been tricking him—a justice of the high court—by impersonating another.

It was a splendid bit of trickery, and one which he would never have penetrated but for the sudden change from the coarse, leering, offensive attitude of Ike Black, to the indignation of an archangel.

His very sincerity had unmasked him.

"Well, what have you to say?" demanded the unknown.

Once more the judge simulated fear.

Inwardly he was jubilant.

"Give me a minute or two of time to think," he whined. "I've—I'm rather confused in my mind."

"Five minutes!" said the other, drawing his watch. "It is now 1.25 A.M."

"Thank you," mumbled the man in the chair.

He stared straight ahead at the fine, white pencil of light, marking the crack between the folding doors, and patted his stomach with his neatly manicured hands.

At one twenty-five, Marion Poole, watching with straining eyes for the return of her lover, experienced again the thrill of the nameless fear.

She hurried to the telephone and called the number Byron Bartnett had given her.

"Oh, Mr. Bartnett, will you please come down to the apartment right away? I've some papers here for you. Yes, Mr. Bradish brought them. And he had to go out again. The papers are very important. Yes, for you. If he was not back by one-thirty, he said—"

She sagged limply against the wall.

She was unable to either continue her speech or to hang up the receiver.

Some terrible peril she knew menaced Joe Bradish—her Joe—the "make-believe man" whom she had rejected when he had asked her to marry him, in that long ago, beautiful spring-time, when the music of hope had blown through the April breezes.

The remorseless hands of the clock were pointing exactly at one-thirty when Marion fainted, quietly. And here, five minutes later, Byron Bartnett found her, after the housekeeper let him into the suite, leaning limply against the baseboard of the wainscoating beneath the phone receiver, dangling from its wire.

"Time's up!" said the man facing Judge Watson, as he snapped the watch back into his pocket.

"It was very short," murmured the man in the chair apologetically. "But, on the whole, quite long enough to have served my purpose," he added, silkily, as the folding doors crashed open, and the coarse features of Court Officer Ward framed themselves in the doorway leading into the private corridor.

Behind Ward came Smut O'Malley, his face no longer dour, but merely murderous. Behind O'Malley stalked Cozy Corner Mike Cochran and Ike Black, his jaw sagging like a gate on one hinge, as he stared at his double.

"This gentleman and I were just about to continue a most interesting conversation," added his honor after a short, hateful bow in the direction of the group.

"Decidedly interesting," supplemented the pseudo-reporter.

"And now, my dear sir, may I ask: 'Who are you?'" purred Watson.

"You may. I am the advance agent of destiny," returned the other, in an unmoved voice.

"By God, we've got him!" whispered Smut O'Malley hoarsely to Court Officer Ward.

The sixth man of the group merely laughed, coldly.

He faced, unflinching, the black, yawning muzzle of Court Officer Ward's "smoke wagon," which leaped, deftly, from somewhere, by a simple twist of that worthy gentleman's wrist, and pointed straight at his heart.

Darkness!

A blurt of orange fire through the gloom as the pistol barked.

A curse—a sound of a falling body.

Then, the hoarser voice of Ward as he struggled.

"Let go of me, Smut! What the hell—"

Lights!

An open window, through which the wreaths of winter fog swirled soundlessly into the forbidding apartment, paneled in black, to almost immediately vanish—like souls obliterated at the wanton behest of some noxious deity.

Court Officer Ward fired through the same window.

A shower of brick dust pattered down into the small L-shaped enclosure, where the wall jutted sharply inward, just behind the window.

"Fer Gawd's sake, quit snappin' that gat!" groaned Cozy Corner Mike. "I never want to hear a gat go off agin in the hull world."

Outside, Joe Bradish, dropping the flat-brimmed fedora and the gray raincoat as he ran, swung round the corner of the wall, out of harm's way, chuckling.

Through the decrepit pair of iron gates he sped, still laughing.

They were open. He had opened them with a key to reenter, sometime before to facilitate recovery of Judge Archibald Watson, drenched to the skin with the heavy fog, and still unconscious; then Joe proceeded to hoist it through the window of the chambers, which the judge occupied, using a small box to aid him in his task of elevating to the height of his shoulders a man whose weight equaled his own, before tumbling him into the carpeted interior, incontinently, and then following himself.

Joe snapped the gates together and snapped the padlock into place.

It was a spring lock.

It had always been a spring lock—ever since the days when, as the old opera house, he had entered that way to make his way

to the stage, in the beginning of his career as "a make-believe man."

The key to that old lock was one of his most treasured possessions.

Then he sped up the street to another, in the thick wintry fog, wiped the make-up from his face, powdered it, and sauntered aboard a cross-town car.

He was in his own apartment just as Byron Bartnett had brought back Marion Poole to complete consciousness.

And, in a few terse words, he told the story.

"There's nothing to fear," said he. "Did you read that bunch of papers implicating Judge Watson in ownership of underworld real estate?"

"Not yet," replied the astonished attorney. "Are you sure they're correct?"

"Cozy Corner Mike gave them to me, when he thought I was Ike Black. He also thought Judge Watson had released Marion. In both he was wrong."

"Wrong?" echoed the attorney; "why, I was in court. I heard Judge Watson's astonishing ruling, myself. I talked with him—"

"You heard me—you spoke to me," said Bradish with a smile. "My dear fellow, I studied that judge and every accent of his voice; his mannerisms, his rulings, his gestures—even his tiniest movements. They make up his personality. That's my business—imitating people. Marion, here, can tell you I spend my life amusing people—I'm only a make-believe man.

"When I saw the whole ghastly farce going on, relentlessly, day after day," continued Bradish, more earnestly. "I became possessed of an insane idea. I felt that, in some way, if the worst came to the worst, I could impersonate Judge Watson, if I could only get the chance to change places with him.

"I knew this was a frame-up—knew it the minute I set eyes on Court Officer Ward—he's a convict. I saw him, less than a year ago, in the front row of an audience up at the State prison, where I went to give my act to entertain the unfortunates of that institution, by request. He applauded me, vigorously. I remembered his face. I knew it in spite of his being in uniform. I looked up his case, secretly. I found he was one of Cozy Corner Mike's handy men—that Mike had obtained his parole, after he had served only a year of a twenty-year sentence.

"I think he knew me, as well. But, I saw he couldn't place me, because he had only seen me in character. However, he was with the judge, all the time, or on guard at the entrance to his chambers.

"I dared not risk arousing his suspicions further than I had already. So I went in the back way, through the abandoned alley that used to lead to the stage entrance to the old opera-house. I had a key that I've had ever since my début in there as a lad.

"Thus I gained entrance to the judge's chambers. Meanwhile, prior to this, I mingled with reporters, and also several times visited the hotel where Marion was arrested. I absorbed their talk, particularly the chatter of the delectable Mr. Black. I found this useful to-night."

"Do you mean to say, sir, that you have impersonated a judicial officer?" severely demanded Bartnett, as Bradish paused.

"I certainly did."

"Then, if discovered, you can be sent to prison."

"Let them," sturdily countered Bradish. "But, first, hear me through. I crept into Judge Watson's chambers late this afternoon after I had visited the dying girl whom I located, with some difficulty, in a room in the hotel where Marion, as I have said, was arrested.

"Like a good actor, I tried it 'on the dog'—that is, my impersonation of Judge Watson was not risked in open court, at first. Smut O'Malley had been watching the girl to keep her from testifying in Marion's behalf. I had already learned this. He's another of Cozy Corner Mike's men.

"But the girl was so near to death that Smut came over to hear the cases in court. I took my make-up bag, went out, and hurried to the hotel. I made up in the back room of a saloon. I went into the hotel and fooled the man at the desk by imitating the judge's tone and manner. He took me to where the girl Marion went to aid was dying. I talked with her, reading a depo-

sition that you drew up and gave me—remember it?"

"Perfectly."

"She was dying. I read it over to her. She said it was all true. She tried to sign it. She was too weak, and died as I tried to put the pen in her hands. She only got the first initial of her name on the paper."

Marion was sobbing. Bradish went over to her and kissed her.

"She's better off," said he. Then he resumed his story.

"I went back to Watson's chambers, after taking off my make-up, but I put it on again in the alley, in a little L-space, where the wall juts sharply out. I got a box and raised the sash."

The attorney shuddered.

"Unlawful entry," he murmured.

"Well, Leander swam the Hellespont, didn't he? Maybe there were 'no trespass' signs on the banks—both banks—who knows?" retorted the actor. "I was keyed up pretty high, I'll admit. But I made up my mind, if caught, to take my medicine. The worst they could do to me was to send me to the same prison where they were trying to send Marion.

"Then something happened to Judge Watson between the time he talked with Ward about the verdict and after the time he talked with Mike over the phone. He'll never know what happened. But this was what occurred: I got him by the neck and dislocated a small nerve. He became unconscious. He only recovered consciousness when I reset that nerve later on. While he sat in the chair I painted his face to look like mine, got off his coat, and trundled him to the window, when I dropped him out, as gently as I could, after dropping my bag to ease his contact with the ground.

"I was nearly ready for inspection when Ward came to say the jury was waiting. I had to 'go on,' as we say, right away. I went. You know what happened. When I went back into chambers I could see Ward was suspicious of what had occurred. He hung around the corridors, fingering his pistol. I took down the phone to call my landlady, but I found I was on a crossed wire, with Ike Black, Smut O'Malley, and Ward, all of them, one after the other, talking with Cozy Corner Mike over his private wire. Can you beat that? And I heard Mike tell Ward to 'handle him if he don't come down immejeately.'

"I guessed it meant me. When Mike called me I pulled all the smooth-stuff I heard Watson pull when Mike had phoned Watson, before I handed him that little trick I learned from a Javanese while playing in the Orient. And Ward was right on the job, just outside my door, fingering his big 'smoke wagon'—pistol, that is.

"So, I had to go down to call on Mike, and be a make-believe man a little longer. I'll give you the details of that later on. When I was going out, Ike Black came up in the elevator. Now, I already knew that Smut and Ward had followed me down to Mike's. And, to be frank, I was a little uneasy as to what they might do when I came out—for Mike was as ugly as sin with me—that is, with the make-believe judge.

"Then, I hit on another scheme. When Ike came past me I hid in a darkened alcove, and gave him a little Javanese neck-medicine. He went down without a sound. He had it coming, too. He was downright untruthful and nasty with Marion—while making believe to be her friend. But he was tougher than the judge and, evidently quickly revived after I left. However, I carried him down one flight, disrobed him, stuck him in a closet, and got into his duds, leaving the judge's hat in my haste on the floor. Then I went back up to Mike's apartment, after a quick make-up, and went in the second time, pretending to be drunk, after saturating my collar with a bottle of booze in Ike's pocket."

"The second time? Great Heavens!" ejaculated Bartnett.

"I got what I went after," quietly returned Bradish. "You've got it in your hand now. Judge Watson will never sit in the Poole case again—there'll never be another trial. I told Mike, when make-believing as judge, about getting the deposition."

"But the girl died before she signed it—it's worthless. She ought to have acknowledged it before a notary, who should have sworn her to the truth of its contents," pro-

tested the lawyer. "Without that deposition in proper form it's worthless."

"All of which you explained, my dear sir, when you gave it to me," continued Bradish. "I pretended to swear a corpse to that affidavit, while a spy listened outside the door of the hotel. I even simulated her reply. The spy ran out—he went to tell some one—they think I've got a real deposition. Let them think so. Do you suppose a nest of crooks and vipers like that—especially after what happened in Judge Watson's chambers afterward, when I faced them all, not a half hour ago—and got away, scot-free, are going to stir up any more trouble for themselves?"

"I could tell you better," said Bartnett, "after you tell me just what happened. You haven't, yet."

"And I won't," said Bradish, suddenly rising and crossing to Marion Poole, "until after I've been married to the dearest girl in the world, except to admit I switched off the lights, dived between Ward and O'Malley, and beat it. Come on, honey-bug, they don't know it's your little make-believe man that's set them all by the ears. I daren't trust you, dear, with any more secrets, until you're my wife. Then you can't take the stand against me. I've got the license—everything. Once we're married, I'm safe."

"The license?" she echoed.

"Yes, dear. I had planned to marry you to-day, in prison—if they caught me making believe. They didn't. Come on, Mr. Bartnett. We'll need you as a witness. I've waited a long, long time for you, honey-bug. We're going South, on a trip, pretty soon—to Bermuda."

"But you spent all your money," protested Marion, "trying to help me."

"Going on the stage again, to-night, at twenty-five hundred, for one week, right in my home town," smiled her audacious lover. "Joseph Bradish, the world's greatest protean, lightning change artist, will appear for one week only, in impersonations of various characters at the celebrated Poole trial. I'm going to play Judge Watson, to-night. I've told the management to send him a box. Watch his face—from the wings—dear. It 'll be a picture no artist can paint, when I come on. Also, Cozy Corner Mike Cochran will be crazy, won't he? As well as Ward, Smut O'Malley—and last, but by no means least—Ike Black, court reporter for the *Sentinel*. That's one way of getting even. And they'll take it, too, with as near a grin as they can muster, lest a worse fate befall them. You see, dear, I've got the papers! And, as *Jack Dalton* used to say, in melodrama, 'the che-ild is in London!'"

He bent over to kiss her delectable lips, while Byron Bartnett turned away to blow his nose vigorously.

(The end.)

TO A PICTURE

BY M, V. CARUTHERS

YOU smile at me from out your frame,
Forever young and gay,
So near and dear, I half deceive
Myself at times, and make believe
That you are just away—

Till Truth's relentless finger points
Me back to last December,
When all the ground was white with snow,
Save where a grave yawned deep—and, oh,
Dear God! Then—I remember!

Polaris and the Goddess Glorian

by Charles B. Stilson

Sequel to "Polaris—of the Snows" and "Minos of Sardanes"

PRECEDING CHAPTERS BRIEFLY RETOLD

IT was while the United States cruiser Minnetonka was returning from the dead land of Sardanes at the South Pole, bringing Polaris Janess, Rose Emer, his sweetheart; Minos, last king of Sardanes, his wife, Memene; and old Zenas Wright, the archeologist, back to civilization that the strange golden man was sighted in the Antarctic Ocean. He was floating, face down, on a bit of wreckage, and was breathing quite naturally in the water!

Polaris saved his life, finding that the man was wearing a sort of respirator. He proved to be Oleric the Red, of Maeronica, whose chief city, Adlaz, was founded by the Atlanteans before Atlantis sunk into the sea. This the adventurers learned after their war-ship had been blasted by a Maeronican fademe, a sort of golden submarine, and they had been brought to shore.

At the very outset of their adventures, Polaris provoked the anger of the priests of Shamar, the Sun, by killing a sacred bull. For this he was doomed to die, and the two girls with him, since no foreign woman might live in the land at the Feast of Years, a few months hence. But Rombar, a sacred dog, befriended Polaris, and insisted on sharing his cell with him and a half-crazy Cockney slave (the Children of Ad enslaved all foreigners they did not kill, and sunk all ships), named Melton.

But first Oleric told the strangers privately that he was really no Maeronican, but a subject of the Goddess Glorian of Ruthar, to the south, and a spy. He promised to free them; and in the course of time he did so, helping Polaris with his dog, Zenas, and Lieutenant Everson to escape to Ruthar, and leaving Rose, Memene, Minos, and Ensign Brooks behind.

"No one, not Bel-Ar, the king's self, would dare to harm the women," said Oleric.

They did not land without a struggle, however, for vengeful Children of Ad had followed in a submarine. The men were sore pressed, and Polaris had received a grievous wound in the head, when there was a shout of:

"For the Goddess Glorian! Slay the Maeronican dogs!"

A party of Rutharians rushed down the defile, and in a few minutes all was over, and Polaris had been carried into the new country.

CHAPTER XII.

A GODDESS WEEPS.

UP the rocky shelves of Illia the Rutharians trudged and splashed, the chasm becoming ever narrower and more gloomy. With the narrowing of the rift, the water became deeper and its current stronger. Then one of the party uncoiled a long rope from his shoulder, and the party marched on in single file, each clinging to the rope like Alpine climbers.

Oleric, clambering at the head of the line, urged haste and more haste.

Presently the water was too deep for Rombar, and the current set so strongly that the dog could not swim against it. At an order from Oleric, two Rutharian hunters seized the brute by the collar, and though one of them got a gashed hand for his pains, they bound Rombar's jaws and feet with ropes and carried him on their shoulders—a task which neither they nor Rombar found pleasant.

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for September 15.

At a point in the ascent where further progress against the deepening stream was impossible, the party left the bed of the river and clambered to the right, where a flight of steep and narrow steps had been cut in the rock along a fissure which branched from the main gorge. Up nearly two hundred of those steps they toiled, until Zenas Wright and Everson, unused to such exertions, were like to faint with exhaustion. At the top of the stairs they emerged into a forest of tall trees, oak and pine and chestnut, which grew almost to the edge of the cliffs.

No sooner had he stepped from the rock stairway than Oleric knelt and kissed the black earth.

"This, my friends, is Ruthar," he said as he arose and faced the two Americans.

From among the trees came a tall, white-bearded chieftain, who was armored from head to heel in a wonderful suit of chain mail, links of steel that shone like silver. At his back swung a two-handed sword which was nearly the length of a man.

He advanced to Oleric and laid his hands on the captain's shoulders.

"You are Oleric the Red, and no other," he said. "Well do I remember you. Once I was your pupil. But that was more than three times ten years ago." He shook his head wonderingly. "You serve Ruthar well," he added.

Now, had Zenas Wright been able to understand the speech of Ruthar, he certainly would have set this chieftain down as a hoary-headed liar. For how could he have been a pupil to Oleric the Red more than thirty years before, when it was plain for any one to see that the captain must at that time have been a babe in his mother's arms?

"Aye, Jastla, it is the old red fox come back to his hole again," Oleric answered, striking the old chief fondly across his broad shoulders.

"Which of these with you is the man—the hope of Ruthar?" questioned Jastla. His eyes passed the stubby form of Zenas Wright by and rested inquiringly on the square and soldierly Everson.

Oleric's ruddy face went sober. His voice choked as he answered:

"Nay, Jastla, neither of these. He comes yonder—and I fear that he is sorely smitten."

As he spoke the six Rutharians who bore Polaris Janess came over the brink of the stair and laid their burden down.

Jastla strode to the side of Polaris and looked down at him.

"A mighty man, with golden hair—and comely, as was written in the prophecy," he muttered into his beard. "What has befallen him?" he asked of Oleric.

While the captain told of the fight at the river-mouth, Zenas Wright knelt at Polaris's head and rearranged the bandages, which had become loosened in the rough journey through the gorge. Rombar, who had been that moment untrussed, pushed growling through the group of men and crouched and licked at his master's face.

"Will he live, Father Zenas? Will he live?" Oleric asked. "Tell us, you, who are skilled?"

"God knows," groaned Zenas. The hand which he laid on the still cheek of Polaris shook so that he snatched it away and hid it. "God only knows. There is a little life in him yet."

"He plucked me from the sea," said Oleric wildly. "That was fated of the gods. Twice has he fought at my side. This day perchance he has given his life for me; and that was of his own strong spirit. I tell you, Father Zenas, that if it would do my brother any good, here would Oleric fall upon his sword and render up his soul unto those that sent it forth." Then he controlled himself. "Can he be moved? Can you keep the vital spark within him for a little space, good father? We must haste and get him to the Goddess Glorian. If his soul be not sped when he reaches her, she can hold it back, if any on earth can. Say, Father Zenas, can you do it?"

"I will try," answered Zenas. "If I had a little wine, now—"

"Wine!" Oleric shouted. "Bring wine, some one of you, and haste, though your lungs burst. And slay a kid, so that we may have broth."

A fleet-footed Rutharian lad set off

through the forest, running with the speed of a deer.

"Now, Jastla, see you to a horse-litter. Two gentle beasts, mind you, but speedy. For we must travel fast and far. I take my brother to the Hill of Flomos. And send on a swift messenger to the Goddess Glorian, to tell her that the hope of Ruthar lies wounded in the forests and is near to death. Haste, Jastla; haste!"

Wine was brought, and it was good wine; for the grapes that grow in the valleys of Ruthar are the finest in all the world. Zenas Wright forced apart the set jaws of the stricken man, using a sword-point to do it, and even as Dr. Marsey, who was dead, had done for Oleric, poured the purple wine and a little broth into Polaris's mouth. The kindly old geologist could only pray that some of it penetrated to the man's stomach; for most of it was spilled out again when they moved him.

Chief Jastla brought a horse-litter. In it, between two powerful beasts, Polaris was slung. The Rutharians wrapped him closely with blankets and furs. The sun had turned to his northward journey, and in the forests of Ruthar the air was keen with the tang of approaching winter—felt there in the uplands long before it reached to the plains and valleys of Maeronica.

Horses were fetched for Oleric, Wright and Everson, and they set off at once along the mountain trails skirting the mighty cañon of the Illia. An escort of half a score of Rutharian hunters rode with them.

All that day and night and until sunset of the next day they rode with only brief stops at small Rutharian hamlets, where they ate hurriedly and changed horses. Word had been sent on before of their coming, and fresh horses were always in waiting. Sleep they did not, save in their saddles, and the two Americans were like to die from sheer weariness.

Oleric did not sleep at all, though of all the party his vitality seemed the least impaired by that racking journey. His face grew haggard and gaunt, and his eyes red-rimmed; but a wonderful determination seemed to sustain his body. He spoke seldom, and then to urge his faltering companions to renewed efforts.

Rombar ran with the horses until he was utterly done up. Then Oleric left the dog at one of the mountain villages, to be brought on later.

In the morning of the second day the party swung to the right, away from the gorge of the Illia, to come to it again about noon and cross it on a bridge of steel and stone that spanned it three hundred feet up from the torrent's course.

Everson, looking at those piles and trusses, judged the building of that bridge to be the feat of no mean engineer. Though there had been a waste of material, the structure would have stood comparison with many a bridge in Europe or America.

Throughout the long ride, Polaris lay like a log in the litter. Occasionally at the stopping places the scientist redressed the wound, smearing it with a healing balsam which an old woman in one of the villages had given him. It was a fearsome gash, and Zenas shook his head over it whenever he saw it. The point of the sword had laid open the scalp at the back of Polaris's head for a matter of inches, then had glanced from the bone beneath and bitten deeply into the neck near the spinal column.

Wright sheared the hair away from the wound and stitched it as neatly as he could. Despite his care the edges of the cut turned blue, as is the way with such hurts if they have not expert attention. In the afternoon of that second day's ride he found that Polaris's hands and feet were becoming cold, and that the geologist deemed the worst sign of all.

Shortly after they had crossed the bridge the contour of the country became less wild. They emerged from among the crags and peaks of the mountains into the foot-hills, where the forests were not so dense as above, and from time to time they came upon large spaces of cleared lands with tilled fields and many vineyards.

In one of the forest glades the party passed a spot where a number of fair-sized trees had been uprooted and partly stripped of their branches and bark. Others, still standing, were mere distorted stubs of trees, their trunks scored and twisted and their foliage gone.

"I hope such storms as the one that did this damage are not frequent hereabouts," said Zenas, pointing out the wrecks to Everson.

Oleric heard the remark.

"'Storms,' say you, Father Zenas?" he said. "The storm that went through here walked on four feet. When we of Ruthar see such a sight in the forest, we know that an amaloc has breakfasted there. I forget the high-sounding name you call him by."

"That lad should have been a writer of fiction," said Zenas to himself when the captain had ridden on. "He almost makes me believe in him.

"Gorry-me," Zenas groaned, easing himself in his saddle, "I wish we were at the end of this ride, wherever it is. I do not think that I shall ever be able to walk again. You," he said to Everson, "you ride along there in your golden armor like—what is it?—a paladin of old, and never a word out of you. Well, I'd sooner stand it, at that, than to go back to that roasting-spit I was put to tend in the king's kitchen." Zenas grunted as recollection stung him.

"Why, do you know, one day I was figuring out a bit of calculus in my head, just for practise, and I let the meat scorch; and the head cook actually laid a dog-whip across my back. Yes, sir; me, a fellow in the National Geographic Society, whipped across a kitchen by a greasy-faced dough-slinger who doesn't know gneiss from rotten-stone!"

Wright grunted again at the memory of that indignity, and then rambled on:

"But we've got to stand it all for the boy here, and for the folks we left behind. God knows I'm willing to for their sakes, and worse yet, if it's to come. But I must grumble once in a while, and I can't help it. Say, Everson, do you believe any of that chaff of our red-headed friend about the mammoths?"

The lieutenant did not answer, and Wright, peering into his face, saw that he was asleep in the saddle.

Well down upon his course was the sun, and the shadows of the trees were lengthening eastward, when the travelers, who for some time had been following a smooth, straight road through rolling hills, came to an old Rutharian villa, which stood among its gardens a considerable distance back from the highway. A low wall bordered the grounds at the front along the roadway, a wall with a pillared gateway, where a drive led in from the road. At the foot of each of the pillars, sitting his horse like a statue, was a Rutharian gentleman.

As the weary cavalcade came down the road the two riders left their posts and advanced to meet it, parleying with Oleric. Scarcely half a dozen words passed back and forth when the red captain set up a joyful shout. When he reached the gateway he turned his horse in, bidding the others to follow.

"Here's hoping that some one will introduce me to a bed before I clean forget what one feels like," said Zenas.

At the side of the ancient house the riders dismounted, Everson reeling from his horse like a drunken man and throwing himself face downward on the grass.

Oleric superintended the removal of Polaris from the litter.

The geologist was bending over his charge as the hunters bore him along when he became aware of the tall figure of a woman that came down from the porch of the mansion and hastened along the walk. She had thrown a long, dark red cloak about her shoulders. In the dusk of the garden the scientist could not distinguish her features; but he saw that her hair was dark, or seemed to be, and that she was taller than most women and splendidly formed.

"The Goddess Glorian!" Oleric cried aloud. "Oh, by the stars of Ruthar, but you are welcome!"

Down on one knee sank the captain and kissed her hand.

"Oh, goddess, after all these years I have brought you the hope of Ruthar. But he is sorely wounded—dying—and you alone can save him. We were bringing him to Flomos with all the speed we might, and thought not to find you here."

"Where else should Glorian be, but on the way to met this man?" she answered

simply. "Jastla's messenger reached Flomos this morning. He rode four horses to their deaths upon his way. You have done well, Oleric the Learned."

When he heard the silvery cadences of that voice, though he understood not a word save the name of the captain, a thrill passed through Zenas Wright, old as he was, and through his aged veins he felt the blood course faster. The woman came nearer. He smelled the warm perfume of her hair as she bent and touched the cheek of Polaris with her hand.

"Bring him within, Oleric," she said, "and, oh, haste, for—" her glorious voice broke. "For he is nearly gone."

Swinging the still form of Polaris shoulder high, the Rutharian hunters passed on and into the mansion, leaving Zenas behind.

"Now, what do you know about that?" gasped the scientist as he sank wearily to the ground beside Everson. "Goddess indeed! What, I want to know, will Rose Emer say when she learns of this young person? Well, I hope she saves the lad; but she'll need to be a doctor of parts, or I'm a donkey. Poor boy! Poor boy!"

In a few moments came Oleric to show Wright and Everson to their quarters for the night in the rear of the house. And a rare time he had to arouse the lieutenant sufficiently to lead him to bed.

White and still, Polaris Janess lay on a bed in an upper chamber of the old house. By the light from a mitzl globe—trophy of some Rutharian chieftain in a foray over the Kimbrian Wall—the Goddess Glorian bent above him and studied his pale features.

"My friend, my poor friend," she said brokenly. "How often through the weary years I have seen you in my dreams—and now to find you—only to lose you."

Hot tears ran down her cheeks and fell on the stricken man's face.

"Oh! It shall not be!" she said fiercely. "You shall not die—not if Glorian must give her soul to hold you back from the gates of darkness."

Throwing aside her cloak, she drew a chair to the bedside. With her fingers she lifted Polaris's eyelids and held them open. She leaned forward and gazed deep into the tawny eyes, now, alas, so dull and lifeless. For hours she sat there, with no more apparent movement than the man she watched over. The whole strength of her being seemed concentrated in some inward, unyielding struggle. And as the hours passed a change came over the sick man. He did not stir. He scarcely seemed to breathe. But his face became less gray and haggard, and the icy chill of death was driven from his hands and feet.

Long after midnight it was when the Goddess Glorian stood up from that bedside and in her heart said wildly, "I have won!"

Summoning her women, who waited without the door, she bade them disrobe and bathe the wounded man. Then they dressed anew the now festering wound and poured a little wine and broth into his throat.

All night long the Goddess Glorian sat and watched him.

In the morning, when Oleric came to the door in answer to her summons, she looked up at him with a wan smile.

"Fear no longer," she said. "The man will live."

CHAPTER XIII.

"A POOR LADY OF RUTHAR."

ON the third day after his arrival at the old Rutharian mansion, Polaris left it. But he knew nothing of that going. He still lay in the heavy stupor which was to hold him thrall for many days. Zenas Wright doubted much the wisdom of moving a man so ill. The scientist himself, after two days' rest, felt scarcely equal to the journey, and the thought of again bestriding a horse made him shudder. Still he reasoned that it was by a miracle that Janess lived at all, and if she who had wrought that miracle, the Goddess Glorian, said he might be moved in safety, why, doubtless she knew what she was about.

A low, four-wheeled car was brought. Across the box of it the hunters lashed light and springy poles and on them piled

robes and blankets, making a soft and easy bed for the sick man. At the head of that couch rode the Goddess Glorian, cloaked and hooded, and at its foot crouched black Rombar, who had been brought in from the village where he had been left, and who seemed little the worse for his long jaunt. Wright and the lieutenant occupied another smaller car in the rear, and in a third vehicle rode a number of the women of Glorian's household. Oleric, mounted and aglitter in chain armor of steel—for he had discarded as soon as might be the hated golden livery of Bel-Ar—rode at the side of the first car. For escort the party had the company of nearly a score of young Rutharian zinds—zind was the only title of nobility in Ruthar.

So they set out for Flomos, traveling by easy stages and with many rests. The roads were smooth and the country more even than that they had left behind. All along the way, be the time of day what it might, they rode between two long lines of people—people silent for the most part, who stood with bowed heads as the cars and the riders passed by.

Far and wide throughout the land had gone the word that the man who had come to be known as the hope of Ruthar was journeying to Flomos, and the circumstances of that journey. These who lined the road were gathered there to do him silent homage. Satisfied were they if they only caught a fleeting glimpse of his still face on its pillow of furs. Over all of Ruthar went up a many-voiced and ceaseless prayer for his welfare.

"H-m, Everson, folks will never stand like that for us, living or dead," said Zenas Wright to the lieutenant, when Oleric had told them the meaning of the silent lines of people. Despite his banter, the old geologist was deeply touched.

Two days and part of a third they traveled—for they did not hurry—stopping for the nights at the homes of Rutharian gentlemen along the road. It was nearly afternoon of the third day when they followed the winding of the highway around the last low hills of the mountain range and came out upon a plateau-plain of wide extent, in the center of which was a wooded eminence, and on its crest the white pillars of a temple shone in the sunlight.

The road stretched straight across the plain through a broad expanse of tilled lands and gardens, which ringed a city that stood at the foot of the hill. It was scarcely a fifth the proportions of Adlaz, this ancient town of Ruthar, which was called Zele-omaz, or City by the River; but it was a pretty place, of broad streets shaded by many trees, gardens and low-built, pleasant homes, with here and there the statelier dwellings of some zind or wealthy man.

Here, too, was the Illia, rock-bound no longer, but a fair and gentle stream, winding through the town and spanned by many bridges.

Skirting the city at the right, the travelers followed a sloping path that led up the hill to where the temple stood.

"Yonder," Oleric said, pointing down to where a group of low buildings of gray stone rambled at the waterside under spreading yew trees, "is the University of Nematzin, of which I am a professor. And there is the laboratory of which I spoke, where we shall make the thunder-dust to shake down the Kimbrian Wall."

"One more day's rest, and I will be fit for anything," answered Everson.

"What do you teach in this university, friend?" Zenas queried.

"A little of the science of the stars, Father Zenas—or I did, for it is many years since I have sat among my pupils—somewhat of history and of language," replied the red captain.

"Humph; you must have been a young teacher," said Zenas Wright, and he ran his fingers through the sprouting stubble of his beard, as he had a habit of doing when things vexed him. Suddenly he jumped in his seat, though the wrench to his sore flesh cost him a wry face.

"Hey! Everson! Look at that, and then tell me if I'm dreaming."

The "that" was a gateway through which the car was about to pass. Oleric followed with a glance the direction in which the geologist pointed and then rode on with a smile.

It was a very curious gate, so curious

that, if it still stands, and it doubtless does, for it was built to endure, there is none other just like it in the world. At each side of the roadway was a section of black stone wall, extending along the path a matter of a dozen feet and some ten feet high. At intervals along the tops of the two walls were set round, squat pillars, also of stone. Those had been hollowed out and served as bases for enormous ivory tusks, which were embedded in cement in the hollowed pillars, and from them curved up to meet over the center of the roadway, where their tips were made fast with double sockets of bronze.

Ivory the tusks were; there was no doubting that; weather-checked and stained yellow by age and the elements, but still ivory. But the size of them! No elephant that ever walked the earth bore ivories of such proportions. For they were as large around at their bases as the chest of an average man; and from base to tapering tip there was none of them that did not measure eleven feet. Seven pair of them there were, and all splendidly matched.

Zenas stared back at that marvelous arch—for it was more an archway than a gate—as hard as he could stare. Not until a turn of the road hid it, did he relax into his seat.

"Maybe he isn't so great a liar, after all," he said; and he meant Oleric. "Everson, those are mammoth's tusks—sure's I'm a sinner."

"Strange land, strange things," answered Everson laconically.

The home or temple of the Goddess Glorian on the hill of Flomos was a small thing by comparison with the mighty Temple of Shamar, but in its way was quite as beautiful. Like the temple of the sun-god, the house of Glorian was built all of white marble. Fronting north toward the city of Zele-omaz was a façade of four-and-twenty sixty-foot pillars. A broad, paved porch, reached by half a hundred steps, lay at the foot of the façade. Back of the pillars were twelve double doors of bronze, leading into a lofty hall, the marble dome of which towered high above the pillars and could be seen from the countryside for miles about when the sun shone on it.

Back of the hall the structure was divided into three floors, or stories, each of many roomy chambers and corridors. The whole was well lighted by windows of clear glass, of which an abundance was used in both Maeronica and Ruthar. Behind the temple, southward down the hill, were the dwellings of Glorian's personal retainers and servants.

Well back from the center of the domed hall and near the foot of a grand staircase which led to the second floor, was a raised dais of marble, whereon Glorian was wont to sit and give judgment in matters of state which were too high for the administration of the zinds who ruled in the different cities and provinces. Once Ruthar had had its dynasty of kings; but that was many years before. The royal line died out, and because of certain circumstances at that time the people raised up no more kings. At the time of the coming of the strangers the Goddess Glorian was the absolute power in Ruthar.

On the dais in the throne-room was another wonder for Zenas Wright to see. It was a massive, double-seated chair, constructed, even to the pegs which held its parts together, of ivory like that in the giant tusks of the arch. An artist of surpassing skill had wrought that chair and had carved it into the semblance of tall lily-stalks with heavy-headed, drooping blossoms and slender fronds. All around the larger stalks were cut the clinging tendrils of a creeping vine, a tracery as fine as lace.

Wright and Everson were given rooms on the second floor of the temple at its western side. Polaris was borne to a chamber on the upper story, where he was tended by Glorian herself and the servants of her household. Rombar took up his quarters in that chamber also, and only Oleric could lure the dog forth from his master's side, and then not for long at a time.

Soon after their arrival at the hill of Flomos, and when they had rested some of the stiffness from their joints, Everson and

the scientist went down with Oleric to the laboratories of Nematzin to begin their work. Though the students of Ruthar were not unskilled in chemistry of a sort, they knew nothing of explosives. So Zenas prepared himself for a series of tests to discover the materials of which he was in need, or, if he could not find what he desired, some combination which would serve.

In that constructive analysis the naval lieutenant could be of little aid. Oleric then found a task for him which was more to his liking. It was the drilling of men.

From her center to her rock-bound coasts, Ruthar hummed with the preparation for war.

"If we are to fight, let us first know how many men we can raise, and how they will be disposed," said Everson. "What is the population of this country, and how will it match up, man for man, with Maeronica?"

All told, Ruthar's people numbered something like a million and a quarter, Oleric informed him; and in Maeronica the population was near to three and one-half millions, at least a half a million of which dwelt in the great city of Adlaz.

"As it is figured in the world, your army then will be made up of one fighting man to every ten persons," the lieutenant said. "If the spirit of the people is with us, we should be able to put at least one hundred and twenty-five thousand men in the field — and Bel-Ar, three hundred and fifty thousand. That is heavy odds."

"Ruthar shall do better even than that," Oleric said with pride. "I promise you that two hundred thousand men shall march when they hear the war-drums — and more may be found if the need grows bitter."

"Can you equip and maintain them?" Everson asked.

"In Ruthar every man is a soldier. They will equip themselves. This day has been awaited for long. Ruthar is ready to give all for the uses of her warrior sons. Fear not. Besides, though I will not deny that the men of Ad are good fighters and their country is far the richer, yet many of them are fat city dwellers and traders, of whom two are not a match for one of the hardy men of the mountains who will march under the banners of the Goddess Glorian. Show them the ruins of the Kimbrian Wall, and were the armies of Ad twice their strength, yet they should not turn Ruthar from her purpose."

Everson nodded thoughtfully. "How will this force be divided?" he asked. "Have you many horsemen? In such a war as this promises to be, cavalry will be invaluable."

The red captain knit his brow in calculation.

"Forty thousand wild horsemen of the hills and mountains, who know not fear, can I promise," he said at length. "Five thousand chariots we can muster, each of two horses, and carrying each two fighting men and a driver to guide the horses; twenty thousand skilled archers; ninety thousand heavy armed men with swords and spears; ten thousand slingers; and twenty thousand men armed with javelins— these last to serve as skirmishers."

Everson's eyes kindled at the recital of that tale of men, and he smiled — one of the few smiles that had lightened his face since his ship had been lost.

"We must gather them into camps at once," he said. "The time is all too short in which to make an army out of raw levies. We must drill them all winter, and that will be a man's job."

Straightway he threw himself into the task with tireless energy. And he vowed to himself that the men who had dared to sink a United States cruiser should learn a lesson of tears and death, and that he would have a hand in the teaching of the lesson.

Oblivion, like a deep and dreamless sleep, was the portion of Polaris Janess. It seemed that his soul had withdrawn itself to some place of peace to wait until its racked and weary body should once more be fit for tenancy. The wound in his neck closed and healed. Somewhat of color crept back into his cheeks. His body began to thrive; but there was in it seemingly little more of sentient life than in a tree which draws its nourishment from

the soil and knows not of days and nights and the cares thereof.

"It is a blood-clot that presses somewhere on the brain," Glorian told his friends, who stood often at his quiet bedside. "'Twill pass away ere long, and he will be whole again."

To the surprise of Zenas and Everson, Glorian and a number of the learned men of the college of Nematzin spoke English almost with the facility of Oleric, from whom, indeed, they had learned it. And this was a great source of delight to the old geologist, who needs must talk and grumble over his labors. And what use is there in grumbling, if there is no one to hear and understand?

Came a day when the curtain lifted from the brain of the sick man, and memory peopled the vacant stage, as once before it had done when he lay ill in the cabin on the ship Felix on his first journey from his home in the wilderness.

Wondering, he lay still with closed lids, as he had a trick of doing when he waked from slumber. He began to reconstruct. The wreck of the Minnetonka passed before him, and then, like a series of pictures, the events which had followed the sinking of the ship: the stranger people; the judgment of the king; the parting from his love; the coming of the red captain in the night and the flight from Adlaz; the fight at the wharves and the farewell of Minos; the great stairway of the Illia—

There the pictures ceased. He could not then or ever afterward, recall the fight in the river, where he had gone down to aid Oleric and come by his wound.

Into his nostrils was wafted a breath of faint perfume. A cool hand was laid against his cheek. He opened his eyes. The details of a high, arched room he saw; windows of glass at the north, where the sun shone thinly and big flakes of snow were floating slowly down — for winter had come to Ruthar; at his cheek a long, wonderfully-shaped, white hand, with tapering, ringless fingers; a slender wrist; beyond it a face. He closed his lids again, with a frown of disbelief. The beauty of that face was such as no mortal ever saw, save in a dream.

The hand stirred, and he looked again.

From the times of Helen of Troy on down through the pages of all recorded history, those pages have been made bright by the faces of fair women who were their nations' boast. Here, before the eyes of the sick man, was a face that was the peer of any that ever shone in fable or in fact. A broad, high forehead above two dark and well-defined arches; beneath them, delicately veined lids and long dark lashes, veiling red-brown eyes, eyes so wonderfully alive with expression that their change was like the bewildering melting of colors in a sunset; between their marvelous valleys, a slenderly-bridged nose with a hint of the Roman; a rich, full-lipped mouth that was the playground of smiles, but which showed also the quality of rare determination, a promise sustained by the firmly rounded chin beneath it; a skin so fine of texture that through it might be traced the ebb and flow of life, as flames show roseate through a marble vase.

Her head had the poise of an empress, and at its shapely crown, piled high, were lustrous coils of hair which at first glance seemed black; but when the light struck on it, glowed as an ember glows when a breath renews its dulness into fire.

Such was the beauty of the woman on whom Polaris looked — and as he gazed, acknowledgment was forced within him that here was one that surpassed in fairness even the Rose Maid whom he loved. And there was no disloyalty in that acknowledgment. Rose Emer was a beautiful woman; but she who sat before him, and who seemed of nearly the same age and whose figure much resembled that of his own dear lady, she had the beauty of unearthly things.

For a moment he stared in silence.

"Where am I, and who are you?" he asked, and smiled faintly in response to her little exclamation of delight that his senses had come back to him. Before she could speak, he muttered: "I had forgotten; she will not understand."

"But I do understand, my poor friend," she said, "and can make answer in your own tongue — if we keep to simple talk."

As the quality of that voice had thrilled

old Zenas, so now it sent a tremor through the veins of the son of the snows.

"You are in the city of Zele-omaz, and I, who have watched while you lay wounded and ill, am a poor lady of wild Ruthar," she continued.

"'Poor' and 'wild' are words that ill beseem you, lady," replied Polaris in the quaint expression that in the long years when his father had been his sole companion, he had absorbed from the pages of Scott's romantic "Ivanhoe," and which contact with modern English had not worn away.

"I think that one Oleric has spoken oft of you, and that I can guess the name you bear — and I find it a most fitting name."

Rose-pink the Goddess Glorian flushed, in a most mortal fashion, and was glad that at that moment black Rombar thrust his head forward over the edge of the bed to claim a share in the attention of his master.

Polaris stirred his hands, and then looked up wonderingly.

"I am weak," he said. "How long have I lain ill, and what misfortune befell me to so lay me by the heels? I understand it not at all; for my memory has tricked me."

Toying with Rombar's collar, Glorian told him what she had learned from the others of the fight at the mouth of the Illia.

"And I do thank you for the life of my faithful captain," she said, "as he will presently. It was a brave deed, a very brave deed. Now you must talk no more, and no more must I weary you. You are worn with sickness, and it will be many days before your strength comes back. Rest and fret not. All things are going well."

She left him, and presently he slept.

CHAPTER XIV.

ZENAS WINS A NAME.

BEYOND their knowledge of the working of metals, in which they had great facility, Zenas Wright soon found that the scientists of Nematzin could avail him little in his search for explosive compounds. Ordinary gunpowder, indeed, he knew he could make easily enough, after a fashion; but he sought for something more powerful by far than that. From the descriptions which he had heard of the Kimbrian Wall, he judged that it would be a rare task to shake it down.

"We might do it with nitro-glycerin," he told Everson. "But we would have to set all of the old wives of Ruthar to soap-making to get our glycerin, and it would be a difficult job to get it pure enough to serve our turn. Besides, nitro-glycerin is mean and uncertain to handle."

The two men sat before a ruddy coal fire in the big laboratory room which had been turned over to the uses of the geologist — a fire well screened from the rest of the room, so that no flying spark should raise a mischief among the experiments of Zenas. Three weeks had elapsed since their arrival at Zele-omaz. Polaris Janess was well along the road to health. Everson and Oleric, laboring tirelessly, had established five great training camps, one on the plain near the city, and four others in the forests to the north beyond the Illia. Already the levies of Ruthar were pouring into the camps, where they were drilled by the zinds and captains, under the direction of the naval lieutenant and the red captain.

Everson had thrown his whole heart into the work. Already he had made considerable progress in the learning of the Rutharian language. He was beginning to take a vast pride in the army he was welding. Born soldiers he found these Rutharians, amenable to the strict discipline which he preached, and to whom his word was law.

He had ridden in this day from a tour of inspection of his camps to visit Wright and learn of the progress of the work on which depended their entire scheme of campaign.

"Nitro-glycerin," said Everson. "So you have found a source of nitric acid, then?"

"Yes," replied Wright. "One of the first things which took my eye among a number of specimens of rock which I found in a case here, was a chunk of sodium

nitrate. You know the stuff—Chile saltpeter, they call it."

"Why not a picrate powder, if you have nitrates to work with?" suggested the lieutenant.

"Picrate — nitric acid — phenol," said old Zenas. "That's the way of it. And to get phenol — lots of it—"

He broke off and stared into the depths of the fire.

"Hey!" he cried, and jumped to his feet so suddenly that Everson started. Zenas pointed at the fire, his little black eyes dancing and his beard wagging with his excitement.

"Well?" queried Everson.

"Coal, my boy, coal! There's oodles of it here. All I've got to do is to rig up a kiln for the distillation of coal-tar oil, and I'll have the phenol. God knows, these beggars are handy enough in the gentle art of blacksmithing. Tell your red-headed master of ceremonies to give me a little help — say two hundred or two hundred and fifty of his armorers, till I get a few kilns in operation and build me a bank of Glover towers, and I'll show you a line of stuff that will beat all of the Fourth of July celebrations you ever saw. Picrates! Humph! I'll turn out a brand of melinite for you that will jar the back door of hell off its hinges—if I don't whiff us all to kingdom come while I'm at the stuff."

Oleric was summoned. The red captain turned over to Zenas Wright not two hundred, but nearer five hundred men, and the old university was straightway turned into a munitions plant, the stench and the fires of which ascended to heaven by day and by night.

"And bring me about all the fat you can find in the kingdom," directed Zenas. "I'll need it to mix with my nice little patty-cakes."

"You shall have it, Father Zenas," Oleric replied. "And it will not come amiss to make all that you can of this pastry. After the Kimbrian Wall is down, we may find some of it useful at the gates of Adlaz."

So interested did Zenas become in this new work of his that he scarcely stopped for meals, and he slept on a cot of skins beside his fire in the old laboratory. One day, as he labored among his test-tubes, the outer door opened, and a tall figure robed in furs strode across the room and stood beside him. Zenas looked up impatiently.

"Oh Lordy, laddie!" he cried, his face lighting up. "It's good to see you on your feet again."

It was Polaris—still somewhat gaunt and tottery, but with a welcome color in his cheeks and a brightness in his topaz eyes that augured well.

"Aye, old friend, 'tis I," he answered. "While you do wear yourself thin in this place of many smells, and Everson rides his flesh off his bones, shall I then be doing nothing but to lie in a soft bed and dream the days away? I will have no more of it."

From that day strength came back to the son of the snows with surprising rapidity, considering that he had been so ill. Nor would he chafe in restless idleness, but demanded work to do. Soon in the five great camps of fighting men his figure and that of the huge black dog which followed him like a shadow were as well known to the soldiers as were those of Everson and the lieutenant. Under the tutelage of the Goddess Glorian, he had advanced in mastery of the Rutharian tongue much faster than either of the other two Americans; for he was a natural linguist and did not find the ancient language difficult.

Old Jastla had come down out of his hills, and it was his particular pride to superintend the training of the son of the snows in the use of the arms of Ruthar. At his first trial, weakened though he was by his illness, Polaris cast a javelin farther by half a score of paces than could any warrior of Ruthar. Within a fortnight, although they might touch him by tricks of fence, there was not a swordsman in the five armies who could wear him down in the play of blades.

Jastla boasted of him throughout the land.

But though he took pleasure in all these things, he knew anxiety with the passing of the days, and in his heart pined mightily for news of his lady in Adlaz town. For that strong, true heart could not forget.

Occasionally Oleric had word from over the wall from some of his secret spies in Maeronica, but never a word of the welfare of the stranger captives.

All of his story Polaris had one day told to Glorian. And she had smiled and cheered him with brave words. And then, when he had gone, she had sat for the half of a day in her chamber, looking out at the snow-capped hills of Ruthar, striving to remember that she was a goddess, and to forget that she also was a woman. Too late she found that the woman conquered.

Five weeks went by from the day when Polaris first went down to the workshop of Zenas. And then the geologist announced that he would give a show. He had some wares which he was anxious to display, he said.

Near the south bank of the Illia, above the city and beyond the camp, stood an old stone tower which long had been crumbling into decay and which Atra, the zind who ruled in Zele-omaz, had purposed some day to tear down. There it was that the geologist said he would stage his performance, and all the camp and a goodly part of the citizens of the town went thither to see what he would do.

At the appointed hour, early in the afternoon, the scientist rode out to the tower, attended by three of his assistants from the laboratory. With them they took a number of cakes of what looked remarkably like the bars of brown soap wherewith the American housewife labors o' Mondays. As much as two men could carry of the stuff they took. The third man bore a rude battery which Zenas had contrived, and a coil of copper wire which the Rutharian smiths had drawn for him, and which he had insulated with woven fiber dipped in gums from the forests.

The tower had been a massive old structure, covering nearly a half acre of ground, and the lower parts of it were still solid. Its roof was gone, and portions of the upper walls had fallen in.

Zenas found that there were a number of chambers below the ground-level of the structure. In the central one of them he bestowed his precious cakes, and with them the end of his copper wire. He directed his assistants to cover the whole over with heavy stones.

"And handle them with care," he cautioned, "or you will come a lot closer to the stars than you are ever likely to be by any other means."

His preparations completed, the geologist bade his henchmen to make themselves scarce, which they were very glad to do. Bidding every one in the neighborhood of the tower to withdraw to a distance of several hundred feet, Zenas uncoiled his wire, of which he had brought a quantity sufficient to keep him out of harm's way. He squatted down behind the bole of a big yew-tree and struck the knob of his battery.

For an instant nothing happened, and Zenas, peering forth from behind his tree, felt his heart sink with disappointment. Then very quietly the entire structure of the tower, which was nearly seventy feet in height, quitted the earth. For a second it seemed to hang suspended in the air like some enchanted thing. A hollow booming reverberated across the plain. The tower flew into fragments. The ice-bound surface of the Illia was shattered by the falling rocks. A gust of air rushed across the plain and through the ranks of the Rutharian soldiery and with it a shower of smaller débris, which fell among them like a storm. From the spot where the tower had stood, a column of greenish-yellow smoke arose and hung heavily.

From the camp and the crowds of citizens went up a low moan of awe, followed by a shout of triumph from thirty thousand throats. Men ran across the meadows to view the aftermath of this wonder—such a thing as never had been seen in Ruthar. Where the tower had stood was a hole in the earth, wherein the structure itself might almost have been buried. No vestige of the masonry was left. Not one stone remained upon another, and many of the larger foundation rocks had been sundered into fragments by the terrific force of the released gases of the melinite.

Rutharians from that day on called Zenas Wright "Father of the Thunders," and accorded him a respect second only to that in which they held Polaris.

Janess, the red captain, and Everson, who had been witnesses to his experiment, ran to the side of the geologist and wrung his hand.

"And now do you, Father Zenas, stay away from that laboratory," said Oleric. "See to it that my men keep to the trick of making this stuff; but do you keep away. Some careless fellow might let a cake of your earth-shaker fall—and we cannot spare you."

"Now show me this Kimbrian Wall," was the comment of Zenas. But the scientist yielded to the entreaties of his friends, and thereafter went no more to the laboratories, save once a day only, to test the purity of the chemicals with which his workmen wrought.

Soon after the destruction of the tower, Oleric, with Polaris and the lieutenant, rode down through the forests to visit the Kimbrian Wall. Now that they were assured of a means to open the way to Adlaz, they were all of them impatient to map out their plan of campaign, in which, as he alone of them all was skilled in such matters, they looked to Everson for counsel.

Three days' riding brought the party to the great barrier which the Children of Ad had builded far back in the dim centuries to separate them from their hated enemies.

As the riders approached the wall, they found the land narrowed to an isthmus, which Oleric told them was nearly eighty miles in extent, by something less than sixty across. The Kimbrian Wall crossed the neck of land nearly midway of its length, but if anything, a few miles nearer to the mainland of Maeronica than it was to Ruthar. On the hither side of the barrier stretched thick forests of oak and pine. Along the isthmus and near its western sea-border lay the course of an ancient road, which once had connected the two countries. To this old highway Everson gave careful attention. In some places it was broken up and overgrown with timber; but the lieutenant thought that little work would be required to put it in shape for travel.

From a pine-clad knoll in the forest they had their first glimpse of the wall, and a mighty work it was. Built of gray stone, now moss-grown and weather-aged, it stretched away to the right and left as far as they could see and ended sheer with the precipitous cliffs above the sea. So enormous were the stones of which it was constructed that it reminded Everson of remnants of the cyclopean masonry, which are to be found in the old countries and which tradition used to tell were built by a race of giants. Probably this work was as old as they.

The wall was nearly fifty feet high, and so broad at its top that two chariots might pass thereon. At intervals of a mile all along its length were watch-towers, garrisoned by the border-soldiers of Bel-Ar. In addition to all those points of strength, the wall had been so constructed that near its top there was an overhang of a number of feet, making it exceedingly difficult for scaling.

Still, Oleric said, it had been scaled, and many times, by small parties of raiders from both sides—and some of them had never returned.

"Look!" the captain exclaimed. "Here comes one of the patrols."

From the nearest tower to the east three men on horseback came riding along the top of the wall, clearly outlined against the pale sky. As they came nearer the forest-watchers could see that the riders were muffled in cloaks. A sharp wind was sweeping down from the south, and it must have been bitter indeed on the unprotected eminence of the wall.

"Ha! 'tis Atlo himself—the captain whom I replaced at the port," said Oleric as the patrol came opposite him. "See, the foremost of the riders."

Sight of his enemies riding by so close proved too much of a temptation to one of the Rutharian fighting men who had ridden down with the party to the wall. He was a master bowman. While the eyes of his companions were fixed on the three riders, he dismounted and slipped away among the trees to the left. In the shadow of a pine he paused and set an arrow to the string.

It was a long shot—nearly a hundred yards—but the winged shaft flew straight and true. It smote the captain, Atlo, on

the shoulder, and the riders in the forest could hear the faint clink as the point fell blunted from the armor which he wore beneath his cloak.

Atlo started in his saddle, then turned and waved his hand, with a laugh. He rode on as if the arrow were a matter of little moment. The other two riders were more timorous than their captain, and they sent many a glance back toward the dark forest shadow as they rode along.

Oleric shouted to the archer to loose no more arrows.

"Let no more raids be made over the wall," Everson directed. "And have a force of men clear and rebuild the old road yonder. Bring it up as near to the wall as may be, without attracting attention. We must attack and take them unawares. We will have to mine underground from the forest to the wall and place our explosives. As soon as the wall is down, we shall throw a force of infantry through the breach, starve the garrison off the wall and hold the territory on the other side against all attack until we can clear the wreck of the wall and lay a road through the gap so that our cavalry and charioteers may pass it. Otherwise, the Maeronicans will hold the breach against us, in which case there would be a delay which we cannot afford—if, indeed, we should be able to fight our way through at all."

Oleric pondered on the plan for a few moments. He looked up with shining eyes.

"A wise counsel," he said. "All of these things shall be done, and right speedily."

CHAPTER XV.

ZOAR OF THE AMALOCS.

ALMOST miracles are the things which may be accomplished by human brains and hands, if there be enough of them and they are united to their work by a common and all-pervading purpose.

Into the old forests above the Kimbrian barrier the Rutharian zinds threw a force of two thousand men and half again as many horses. The ancient roadway through the wood to the foot of the wall was cleared and rebuilt as though by magic. Everson, visiting the scene of the work reflected somewhat bitterly on the contrast between the manner of this labor and any similar task to be done in the land where he was born. There, he knew, would have been the delays caused by failure to supply the necessary materials and failure again to get them to their appointed places on contract time. There would have been labor strikes, jealousies and bickering among leaders. In the end, of course, the work would have been done, and well done—but with so much of pother.

But in Ruthar there were no walking delegates. Happy were the workmen to labor from sun to sun, and others to take up the task in the hours of darkness. Materials were free and inexhaustible, and the zinds and leaders worked together like brothers, each doing what was required of him, as though his very life depended upon it.

Within a fortnight of his first view of the Kimbrian Wall, the lieutenant deemed that the time to strike was nearly ripe. Two months and nearly a half of another of the allotted six were past. Three months and a half remained before Adlaz would gather for the Feast of Years. Three months and a half in which to conquer a nation and take a walled city, the strength of which was a tradition! Yet it must be done. And Everson, when he saw the tools with which he had to work, hoped high. This was an archaic people; but he found its sons good companions, sturdy, truthful, straightforward as their own long sword-blades. He believed they would follow to the death and that they would not come too late to the Adlaz gates.

Remained one more to complete the tale of wonders of this lost and forgotten land.

One day Glorian, who of late had avoided Polaris, summoned the son of the snows and bade him bring with him his American comrades and Oleric the Red.

"I know that you are nearly ready to go up against the Kimbrian Wall and the hosts of Bel-Ar," she said. "But before that day comes, there is a pilgrimage that must be made to one, without the aid of whom perchance your greatest effort would be in vain. Bring horses; for on this journey I ride with you."

Polaris rode a splendid black stallion, splotched with white at forehead and fetlock, which had been the gift of Jastla, of the hills. When they were ready to leave the temple gates, Rombar came barking at the horses' heels.

"Best to leave the dog behind, brother," said Oleric. "We go upon a path where he may find ill-favor."

So Rombar was locked and chained in a stable, and a fine uproar he made when he saw his master ride forth and leave him.

Cloaked and hooded in a wondrous robe of red fox-skins, Glorian rode on a cream-colored palfrey, attended by one of her women in waiting only. Never had she seemed more fair and queenly. Like some bright daughter of the white North of the the long ago, was she, of whom the skalds have sung in their undying sagas. Zenas Wright, looking at her, found himself humming a bar from "Die Lorelei."

From her he glanced to Polaris, who rode beside her. The son of the snows was clad from head to heel in the glittering chain armor which Rutharian smiths had forged for him, and cloaked in the black skin of a forest bear. At his back swung a two-handed sword. A winged helm, brilliant with gold-work and curtained with a hood and cape of delicately wrought links, sat upon his tawny hair. Long since a razor of keen bronze had swept the beard from his cheeks and chin. His face, that had been so drawn and wan, was filled out once more, and was again the eager, strong, yet almost boyish countenance, which the old scientist had come to love as that of his only son.

Only in the amber eyes had the troubles of the years left their mark—a shadow of sadness when they were thoughtful or in repose, but which did not ill become them.

"She may be a goddess," thought Zenas to himself, "and she is beautiful enough to be a real one; but if she hasn't gone silly as a cow-girl over this lad of ours, then I'm a donkey, and a blind one, to boot. O trouble, you've worn skirts ever since you quit fig-leaves."

Zenas shook his head. The geologist had never married.

It was no brief pleasure-jaunt on which Glorian led, but nearly two days' hard riding into the northwest from Zele-omaz, across heavily-wooded mountains and through valleys deep with snow.

Leaving the hills at last, the party came to a vast, dark forest, silent, somber and covering the rolling land like a black pall. Into its soundless glades the riders penetrated and rode for miles.

Hereabouts they passed at times broken, mangled remnants of trees, like those which Wright had noticed on the mountain road from Illia's steps to Zele-omaz. Occasionally they came also to huge stacks of what seemed to be dry and weather-beaten hay. These were weighted down at their tops with branches from the forest. In some of the stacks caverns had been cut away, as cows munch out the filling of a barn-yard straw-stack, leaving only the outward shell.

Taking note that these rifts were higher in the stacks than three cows standing atop each others' backs could have reached, the little black eyes of the explorer widened; but Zenas still held with tenacity to his last shred of disbelief. "Not in the twentieth century," thought he. "I'll have to see one and touch it to believe."

Presently they saw ahead of them a clearing in the depths of the wood, and a stretch of long buildings, built of stone, and with their windows set high in the walls near their roofs. As the riders neared the clearing the wind brought to their nostrils a pungent and penetrating odor, which, to two of them at least, recalled faraway days of childhood, a big, white tent with a sawdust floor, pushing crowds of laughing, chattering people, the crackle of peanut shells underfoot, and monstrous, mouse-colored beasts that stood and swayed, and flapped their door-mats of ears lazily, and begged for the peanuts with sinuous, groping trunks.

With such a picture in his mind, the breath of the old geologist came quicker than was its wont.

It was late afternoon when the riders entered the clearing and approached the buildings, which stood about the four sides of a square, enclosing a space of nearly three acres. As they rode into this court, following a path between two of the build-

ings, the travelers saw that a number of smaller structures of stone and wood occupied a part of the square. Here and there in the court, fires of brush were burning—for it was bitter cold in the forest depths—and dark figures of men passed to and fro about the fires. A pack of shaggy, wolf-bred dogs came yapping at the horses' heels.

"Who comes?" cried a voice. Men bearing spears ran forward from the fires.

"Glorian of Ruthar comes to visit Zoar of the Amalocs," answered Oleric.

Straightway the armed men knelt in the court-yard, and one in a stern voice called back the dogs.

A door in one of the houses near the center of the square was opened, and the form of a man stood there, silhouetted against a flaring light within the dwelling.

"Methought that I heard a voice well known to me, speaking of Glorian of Ruthar and of Zoar of the Amalocs." The tones of the man in the doorway were low, but clear and sonorous as a bell. "I thought it the voice of one Oleric the Learned," the man went on. He bent forward and shaded his eyes with his hand. "Are you indeed come, red one? Ride forward that I may see."

Oleric's answer was drowned in a terrific chorus of squealing groans, which seemed to issue from the larger buildings on all three sides of the square. So unearthly and piercing was the din, that Zenas Wright would have clapped his hands to his ears; but he found his best efforts needed to control his horse. The steeds of all the party snorted and reared in terror of that hideous outburst. They would have bolted, but knew not where to bolt; and presently the clamor was ceased, and they stood still and trembling.

"What demons of the place are these?" cried Polaris. He sprang down from his horse, tossed the reins to the man nearest him, and ran to the head of Glorian's palfrey, which was curveting and threatened to pitch its mistress from her saddle.

"Those are the pets of Zoar," Oleric answered, laughing loudly. "They know his voice and answer him in their own fashion." Spurring his restive horse, the red captain rode forward to the porch of the dwelling.

"So, 'tis you, indeed," said Zoar as the captain advanced into the ring of firelight. This time the man spoke softly, almost in a whisper, and was not again interrupted. He stepped to the side of the captain's horse and took him by the hand. "Who rides with you, and why do you ride to seek Zoar?" he asked. "Is the time come, red one? Is it come?"

"Aye; the time is here, Zoar," said Oleric soberly. "Our years have not been in vain. Yonder sits the Goddess Glorian, and holding her horse's head is the hope of Ruthar, whom I have brought up from the sea."

"And the Kimbrian Wall?" Zoar asked.

"It waits but the coming of the amalocs, when we will push it down like a barrier of straw," Oleric answered. "Ruthar stands in arms as she never has before, and the land rustles with banners. We have come to ask your aid. When we know that Zoar of the amalocs is on the march, then will the war-drums be sounded."

"Has the ancient crown touched his brow?" asked Zoar.

"Not yet; we wait your word."

"It is given." Zoar lifted his face to the dim sky. "Beyond the mists the stars of Ruthar shine, never so brightly," he muttered. He laid his hand on the captain's arm.

"On the third day from now Zoar of the Amalocs will march," he said. "Now bring your party within, and they shall enjoy what poor hospitality I have for them, who entertain so few guests."

Men led away the horses, and the travelers entered the hall of Zoar.

"Ah, daughter of the stars," he said, and bowed, as Glorian crossed his threshhold, "many years have gone since I last looked into your eyes; but I find that the will burns strongly still, and your beauty has not dimmed. But I grow old, daughter, old and very weary."

Gravely and courteously Zoar welcomed his guests, and bade them rest and sit at meat with him. It was a plain place into which he ushered them; yet was it rich, as the world counts riches, and its wealth was all of ivory. Seats, tables, cabinets, even the casings of the windows and the doors were of ivory—wonderful, finely-grained stuff,

some of it white as alabaster, and some of it cream-yellow with the tint of age. And the carvings on it must have been the work of years.

Zoar, the host, the travelers found quite as remarkable as his ivory treasure. He was a slight, short man, hardly so tall as Zenas Wright and not so stocky as the geologist. He wore a long, white beard, and his hair, of the same silver, flowed across his shoulders. His eyes, under bushy brows, were bright and kindly. His step was quick and firm, nor did his limbs or hands tremble. Yet there was on him the stamp of an unutterable, incredible age. His skin was as yellow-pale as the oldest of his ivory, and the whole surface of it was fretted with thousands of infinitesimal wrinkles. When he spoke or moved it was with spirit and animation; but when he fell into fits of abstraction—and that was often—Zoar looked very like a mummy fresh-stripped from its tomb.

Polaris the old man regarded with especial interest, and when the meal had been cleared away he sat and talked with him and Glorian for many minutes, recalling odd, old tales of the history of Ruthar, with which he showed remarkable familiarity.

" But Ruthar's greatest story is yet to be made," he said in conclusion of his tales. Then he called his servants to show his guests to their chambers.

" What! Have I ridden all these miles, friend Oleric, and then to be put to bed without the chance to tell you that these wonderful beasts about which you have bragged so much are only elephants after all?" said Zenas Wright, forgetting in his stubbornness the ivory gateway at Zelaomaz.

The red captain grinned and put a question to Zoar. The old man answered with a shake of his head:

" The amalocs love not to be disturbed at night, and especially they love not fires or lights. If you and your friends would sleep in peace this night, I counsel that you wait till daybreak to see the beasts. Otherwise they may revile you in such fashion as will shake your couches and drive all sleep from your pillows."

So Zenas was forced to be content and go to his bed with no chance to crow over Oleric. All night long there penetrated occasionally through the geologist's slumbers the noise of raucous trumpeting and the padding stamp of ponderous feet.

When they had broken their fast in the morning, Zoar led his guests into the court and sent men to throw open the great bronze doors in the front of the nearest of the stone buildings.

" Now for an elephant," muttered Zenas. " Perhaps a mighty big one, but still an elephant." Then Zenas stopped speech and his jaw sagged down.

Out through the doors of bronze and into the open court stalked a mountain of flesh and ivory and stood swaying restlessly from one foot to another, flapping ears that would have made a bed covering, and looking keenly about with little, inflamed eyes. Elephantine in shape only was this monster. The points of its shoulders were fifteen feet from the ground—a full yard taller than the most stalwart elephant that ever bore the howdah of a mogul emperor. Tusks that were ten feet long projected from its massive skull, curving downward where they left the bone and then out and up in such fashion that if they had been continued farther they would have formed spirals. The body of the monster was covered with a coarse and woolly growth of reddish-brown hair, through which pricked long, black bristles. On the trunk the wool was sparse and the bristles shorter, and one could see that the hide of the beast was a drab-gray. Neck it had none; but along the spine, just back of the skull and extending beyond the shoulders, was a ridge or mane of coarse, black hair.

His face gone white and his eyes round and goggling, Zenas Wright stood and stared up at this Gargantuan offspring of the hinder ages.

" *Loxodon!*" he breathed.

Never in all his life had the geologist felt so small and insignificant as in the presence of that towering survivor of the prehistoris past.

Zoar stepped forward in front of the beast.

" Ixstus!" he called gently.

The great ears inclined forward to attention.

"*Stekkar mal!*" the old man commanded.

Down swung the vast, wrinkled trunk in a huge loop, into which Zoar stepped and was hoisted to the table of the monstrous skull—a flat place where five men might have sat and played at cards.

Another word of command, and the mammoth advanced a couple of paces. The snakelike trunk groped forward, and Zenas, wriggling some as he went, was swung aloft and found himself seated breathless by the side of Zoar. The master of the beasts smiled at the other old man.

"When you come again to your own land, you may tell your children's children, if you have them, that you have sat on the head of an amaloc, the grandfather of all beasts," said Zoar.

While Zenas appreciated that honor, it might be said that he was much relieved when he got his feet on the ground again.

From building to building of the immense stables, the scientist was led with growing wonder. Ninety and three of the giant mammals there were, of which no one stood less than twelve feet high. But Ixstus was the champion and patriarch of the herd.

As the riders journeyed back to Zeleomaz, Oleric told again how the Children of Ad had driven the beasts southward from their lands with fire, and how the men of Ruthar likewise had made war upon them, until they had like to have become extinct.

"But then came the prophecy, and men of wisdom set themselves to study and tame the beasts," he said. "And now, when the wall is down, and Ruthar takes the road to Adlaz, the amalocs shall lead the way, and Zoar and his servants shall drive them against the hosts of Bel-Ar."

"Won't the Maeronicans scare them again with fires?" asked Everson.

"Nay; that has been provided against," said the captain.

"Lady," Polaris said to Glorian, "I have heard and seen many strange things in this country of yours, and I have learned much. One more thing I would ask that you make clear to me. Oleric has, and last night the old man back yonder did again speak of things of the long ago, in which you had a part. What did they mean? You are scarcely of mine own years."

Glorian glanced hastily at Oleric, and then she answered:

"When the world was younger, men had the secret of years. The slave O'Connell told Oleric that it was written in your sacred book out yonder in the world that such was so. That secret was lost. For ages it was lost. But it was found again in Ruthar. I am one of those to whom it has been imparted."

"You mean, lady, that *you*—" Polaris gasped.

"My friend, I first saw the light on Ruthar's hills well nigh three hundred years ago," Glorian replied, and as he involuntarily shrank in his saddle, she added hastily: "It is a matter of the inward will that holds the spirit and the flesh. To only a few is it given to have the will to prevail for a time against time itself. And they are not immortal. Presently old age will come to me as it has to Zoar, and I shall shrivel away—and die." She shuddered.

Polaris looked at this fair, fresh woman, beautiful as a goddess indeed, and by all earthly standards in the first bloom of her young womanhood, and he felt that this matter was beyond his comprehension.

"Are there, then, any others, besides you and Zoar?" he asked.

"One other only—and he rides at your side," she answered. "Oleric the Learned is younger than I by only fifty years."

"Now, my brother, are some of my wild sayings explained to you," Oleric said. "We do not ask that you believe; for this thing is new to you and contrary to all that you have learned. Only the years will show you the truth of what we tell you—if they pass without accidents. For we are not proof against mischance. A sword-stroke may end my days as swiftly as any man's."

"Would you that I impart the secret to you?" asked Glorian. And she turned and looked deep into Polaris's eyes. "You have a will that is stronger than most, and I think that you might well exert it to hold back the years, were you instructed. Say, shall we teach it you?"

"Nay, lady," said Polaris. "I will live

my appointed years, be they few or many, and die when my time comes. One short human life, it seems, can hold all the troubles for which a man has heart. And I would not, if this thing be possible, see my friends grow old and die, while I lived on."

Glorian sighed. Then she seemed struck by a new thought, and asked:

"What will happen if Ruthar is too late, and you reach not your friends in Adlaz—and the lady Rose, of whom Oleric has told me? What if you come not to Adlaz in time to save them?"

"I think that I shall be in time," Polaris said grimly. "If I am not, then I think death shall find me on the road—and be welcome."

Zenas Wright, hearing these things, and marveling, became troubled.

"Wow!" he said to the lieutenant. "I can believe anything now. To-day I have seen a living mammoth, and I feel about three thousand years old myself. And now, too, look out for squalls."

CHAPTER XVI.

MINOS STRIKES HARD.

DAWN, the cheerless gray of clouded winter, crept over the city of Adlaz. In her bed in the prison-palace of Bel-Tisan the dark-haired Princess Memene of Sardanes lay in the pain that only women know. Beside her watched Rose Emer and an old Maeronican wife, whom the kindly Captain Brunar had suffered to come in and give her aid. A little later a thin wail echoed in the old audience hall; for this business of life is serious, and none comes into it without protest.

It was a boy, a fine and lusty little lad. And Memene, when she was told, took the child in the hollow of her arm and snuggled it against her and nursed it.

"Oh, that Minos were here to see!" she said faintly, and again: "It is the king he was so sure of." She smiled wanly at Rose. "It is the king, my sister. And he shall be named Patrymion, after a man who is dead—a very brave man."

Presently she slept.

An hour later, when Rose stole in to see if all was well, she found that all was well indeed. Bringing that fresh life into the world had overtaxed Memene's strength, and now she rested—long and well, the ineffable smile of motherhood hovering about her still lips.

When she could control her grief—she had come to love Memene dearly—Rose summoned Brunar and told him what had befallen. The captain heard her sorrowfully, for he had honored and admired the Sardanian princess and pitied her sad circumstance. He sent the old woman out to fetch a younger one to care for the child. And then he brought men to bear Memene away. Out of the kindness that was in him, the captain looked to it that she lay in a fair and pleasant spot, and not where the common people of Ad buried their dead; and in Adlaz a woman who died in childbirth was held in higher honor than a soldier who fell in battle.

Persuaded by Rose, and because he had some knowledge of English and could bear the message, Brunar took horse at noon and rode down to the harbor, there to seek Minos.

This happening was nearly two months after the departure of Polaris and the others who had gone to Ruthar. In the intervening time Oleric the Red had tried and tried again to get word through to Adlaz, informing those who were left behind of the fair progress of events. Always he had failed until one of his men, by craft and waiting, had gained a place with the prison-guard.

With him Rose Emer managed to get speech, and they arranged that on the following day he should slip away and try to reach Ruthar again, bearing a message from her to Polaris.

On one of the quays in the harbor of Adlaz sat Minos, the Sardanian. It was cold on the quay, but he did not feel it. His back was weary with carrying burdens, but he was unconscious of that weariness. Why should the body list when the soul is dead within it? Nor did his eyes see the dancing waters of the harbor, where the fademes of Bel-Ar rode at their anchors. Until this day he had counted the hours

with hope, and had borne his tasks with patience. Now hope had gone, and the taste of living was as dry dust.

For Memene was dead.

When Brunar had brought him the news, he had heard the captain through, aye, and thanked him gravely. Then he had turned twice in his tracks and fallen like a stone. So long had he lain that Brunar deemed him dead. When he had come back from that swoon, Minos would work no more; nor did any seek to force him. He had wandered aimlessly out on the quay. When night fell, it found him still sitting there.

It was a wild night. The moon shone but dimly, and oft was veiled by scudding snow-clouds, and the stars were wan. Far to the south, over Ruthar, a faint rose-pink against the sky told that the southern lights, aurora australis, were playing. Somewhere beneath their flickering radiance lay the lost kingdom of Sardanes that the snows had covered deep. A wind, gusty and fitful, leaped over the mountain-rim and tossed the waters of the crater-lake so that the fademes swung restlessly and clanked their anchor-chains. One by one the mitzl globes among the warehouses and along the quays were hooded, until only the watch-lights were left burning.

A soldier of the guard hailed Minos; but the Sardanian answered not, stirred not. "Now let the fool sit and freeze," said the soldier impatiently, and then added, "Poor fellow," for he had heard the story of the fallen king, and had a good wife and bairns of his own in Adlaz town.

In Sardanes, Minos had been known as the smiling prince. But for all his patient, kindly ways, he was high-spirited. And once roused, none was quicker to strike than he. Events of the last few weeks had galled his temper. Now, coming out of the stupor into which this final blow had cast him, he was near to madness.

Willingly would have Minos found his way to Adlaz, plucked Bel-Ar from his gilded bed and broken him across his knee. But the way was treacherous, and there were many guards, and he knew that he could not reach the king. Into the south he would have gone, to seek Polaris and to play a man's part in the great war. But that way was closed to him also. The few men that he might slay in the attempt before they pulled him down and slew him would be all too few to satisfy the fires within him that burned fiercely for vengeance. With only a great calamity would Minos be content.

Uneasily tossed the fademes in the harbor, and the chains of their anchors rattled.

Finally Minos heard them. Then he knew why they were calling to him.

Many times in his work about the harbor of Adlaz the Sardanian had been on board the fademes. He had helped to discharge the cargoes of those which came in from the far islands of the southern seas, bringing strange tropical fruits, dainties for the lords and ladies of Adlaz, and other articles of the commerce which their captains carried on with the savage islanders. On many an atoll of the Pacific the brown Melanesians knew all the steel and gold clad white men who came up from the sea to trade with them.

But they kept out of the track of civilization; for that was their law. Civilized men saw them not, though they sometimes heard tales of them among the savages—tales which, of course, they did not believe.

Working on the ships as he had, Minos had learned much of the mode of their operation. Himself no mean worker in metals, the mysteries of these wonderful ships of the underseas had caught his fancy, and he had studied them. He knew that such a lever turned would start the fademe forward; that such another halted it; and others which caused it to turn and to dive beneath the surface or emerge at the will of its engineer. He also knew where were the levers which controlled the mighty power in the four great shafts of yellow glass and which released the terrible rays of lights, the rays of the nameless color, before which all things were destroyed, and which turned even the water that they met into surging vapor.

With that knowledge in his mind and the red fury in his heart, Minos knew why the clanging anchor-chains were calling.

It was past midnight when the Sardanian king stood up at the end of the quay. He

stretched wide his arms, and the iron-sinewed thews of his shoulders and back cracked as he stretched. He glanced up at the distant stars.

"Once aforetime, so told the red man from the sea, those Hellenes who were my ancestors did turn back this nation when it was swollen with conquest and would have mastered all the world," he whispered. "Once more the power of Adlaz rides high, and it makes ready to go forth and subdue the earth. Well, a Hellene shall stay it again—and what I leave, may my brother Polaris finish."

In the shadow of a warehouse the king rubbed and strained his chilled muscles back to life. At the side of the wharf he found an open boat, and fetched its oars. Then he rowed cautiously out into the harbor.

Scarce a score of yards from the quays rode the nearest of the fademes. Minos boarded it on noiseless feet, and cast his boat adrift.

In the cabin of the fademe were sleeping two sailors of its crew and the engineer. Them Minos slew with his bare hands. And though the engineer ere he died slashed the king's shoulder deeply with a dagger, he heeded it not, scarcely felt it.

Going on deck again, he unhooked the chain of the anchor and let it slip quietly into the water. Then he closed the double doors fore and aft, and made them fast.

Under the lights in the lower gallery, Minos studied the levers and the engines. At a turn of his hand he felt the vessel sink beneath the surface. Another lever wrenched, and the fademe started gently ahead, and the king felt that he was safely launched on his dangerous venture.

Before he had submerged the vessel, Minos had set in his mind the location of the fademes. There were nearly one hundred and fifty of them in the harbor. Five he knew were on patrol duty constantly off the Maeronican headlands. There were perhaps another dozen sailing the outer seas on the missions of Bel-Ar. Those at anchor in the harbor were disposed in three long, irregular lines, with nearly fifty ships in a line.

Minos had submerged the fademe, which he had taken some forty feet. When he reached a point which he thought must be nearly under the first vessel in the southern line, he turned off the power and halted. He fetched ropes and tied them, one to the starting lever and one to that which would stop the fademe. Carrying with him the other ends of the ropes, he climbed the ladders to the pilot-house, which rode like a small tower at the top of the fademe.

Here in the pilot-house was a powerful revolving search-light. Here, also, were the levers which controlled the tubes of glass which projected the deadly light-rays.

Swinging the search-light to point upward through the crystal roof of the pilot-house, Minos unhooded it, and its bright, white bar of light thrust upward through the water. By its radiance he saw that he was not yet under the first of the fademes. Its golden hull glittered just a few feet beyond the radius of his light. A twitch of the rope which he had adjusted below sent his own vessel ahead.

Under the first fademe he halted; and with a grim prayer that the destroying agency might not be out of order, he pressed the lever that controlled the upper shaft of glass.

With a mighty hissing and seething of the water, the indescribable light-ray leaped upward, so dazzlingly brilliant in its unknown color that it nearly blinded the man who had loosed it.

Full on the bottom of the fademe above him the light-ray struck and played, with the water boiling around it. The metal hull crumpled away like solder before the tinsmith's point. So swift and furious was its action that in an instant Minos saw the vessel above come sinking down. He had barely time to pull his rope and get his own fademe from under. As it was, the descending wreck grazed the stern of his vessel with a jar that nearly unseated him. Thereafter he went more swiftly.

From ship to ship he went down the long line, scarcely pausing under each. Ship after ship he left behind him—sunken and useless wrecks.

Minos had finished with the first row of fademes, and was coming back on the sec-

ond line, when a guardsman on shore saw an upthrust of furious light from the deck of one of the golden ships, and then saw the doomed fademe plunge down.

Throwing up his hands, the soldier ran across the harbor court, shouting that some captain had gone mad and was destroying the fleet.

Then the harbor that had been still became alive. Lights flashed up. Men ran hither and thither. A messenger was despatched to Adlaz to report to the king. Some sober-minded men and brave launched small boats into the harbor to go out and warn the engineers of the other fademes.

Well near the end of his second line was Minos when he bethought him that his activities must draw attention to him. Then he loosed in succession the other three tubes, and their deadly rays shot forth, one from each side and one below. The king let them roar unchecked, and all around his vessel the water was turned into a boiling inferno. Like the evil genius of Adlaz, he rode on, leaving only wreckage in his wake.

Part way down the last and northern line, the end found him.

Engineers on the other fademes had been awakened. Hastily they plunged their vessels beneath the surface and set out against the destroyer. Because of the fierce play of his four rays, they could not come at him from either side or from above or below.

But one pilot steered in behind and, with the blazing peril a fair target, loosed the destroying ray from his own fademe.

From behind him Minos heard a roar of steam and water entering in. A blinding radiance shot through the gallery below the pilot-house, withering all things as it passed. The structure of the fademe crumpled away beneath him.

"Memene!" he cried. "I come!"

Then the rising waters and the great darkness.

So by the hand of Minos of Sardanes perished the mighty navy which the king Bel-Ar had amassed to go forth and conquer the world. Of his hundred and fifty fademes that had ridden in the harbor of Adlaz, a bare score remained to him. And this is the tale which Brunar, the captain, told in the morning to Rose Emer in the old prison-palace of Bel-Tisam, and which she set down and sent by messenger to cross the Kimbrian Wall to Polaris Janess in Ruthar.

CHAPTER XVII.

POLARIS MAKES HIS CHOICE.

SCARCELY had the riders from the forest home of Zoar of the Amalocs come again to Zele-omaz ere Everson was off to see to the course of his operations at the Kimbrian Wall. He snatched only a few hours of rest and sleep, and rode out in the night.

On the day after the return, which also was the day on which Zoar had promised to set out with his mighty herd on the road to the barrier, Oleric the Red sought Polaris in the camp to the west of the city, and bade him accompany him to the Temple of Glorian.

Oleric told naught of the meaning of the summons, but rode with Janess through the city, saying little and staring at his horse's ears. Never had Polaris seen the red captain so silent and so thoughtful.

"What ails you, friend?" asked the son of the snows. "Why so moody, as is not your wont? Has aught gone amiss?"

"Nothing amiss," the captain answered. "But a matter is toward that concerns yourself closely—and I know not if I have been wise to keep it from you for so long."

He would say no more, and presently they were at the temple.

Oleric led Polaris into the high-domed audience-hall, which they found empty, save for the Goddess Glorian, who sat in one of the seats on the double throne, and who looked on Polaris with kindling eyes as he crossed the hall.

To the northern wall led Oleric, and they paused before an ancient panel of black rock, which had been set into the marble at about the height of a man's head. So old was this slab or block of adamant that its surface was all crackled;

yet it was smooth as polished slate. Across its face ran carven lines of writing, like the lines of a runic legend.

"This stone bears the ancient prophecy of Ruthar," Oleric said. "Here in the long ago were writ the words of that which we believe is now to come to pass. See how the stone shines. It has been worn smooth by the lips of countless chiefs of Ruthar."

With unwonted solemnity the captain gazed into the eyes of his friend. "Give close heed, and I will read it you," he said, and read:

"In a far time—more than the length of years of three amalocs—a mighty, fair-haired man shall come up from the sea. He shall break down the wall at the north. He shall lead Ruthar and the beasts of Ruthar through the wall. And they shall take Adlaz and destroy the king of Adlaz—"

The captain paused, and again looked strangely at Polaris. He concluded the reading:

"And the man shall be king over Ruthar and Adlaz."

Janess stared at the ancient writing in silence, and his brow clouded over.

"This is the whole of the prophecy of Ruthar—the part of which I have kept concealed from you—though every lad in Ruthar knows it," said Oleric hastily. "I beg of you, my brother, that you will forgive me if I have done ill. But I have thought it wise to keep silence thus far. Now is come the time when nothing must be kept back."

He stopped speaking, and both he and Glorian gazed earnestly at the doubtful face of Polaris.

"You mean that *I* shall be king of Ruthar," Polaris said at length. From one to the other of them he glanced.

The red captain nodded slowly.

"So it is writ in the prophecy," said Glorian. She left the throne, and came and took Polaris by the hand.

"And, O, man from the sea, for whom Ruthar has waited so long and patiently, you cannot gainsay us now," she pleaded. A smile of appealing sweetness came to her aid.

"But, lady, to be a king I did not bargain when I came hither with the captain; though," and he smiled, "I was in an ill place to drive a bargain, and might have yielded almost anything. But to be a king—I like it not. I am neither of Ruthar nor of Ad. I am a simple American of common birth. I do not wish to be a king, but merely to go hence with my own people, if I may. And if I did wish it, what of the people? Would they relish the thought of an outlander on their throne?"

Again Glorian answered him:

"It is so writ in the prophecy."

And Oleric said: "And the prophecy is known to all the people, as it has been for centuries. From the wall to the southern cliffs, there is no man or woman in all Ruthar who does not already look upon you as the king. Think well, my brother."

"But would it not do as well if I were to serve you and Ruthar for a while, and those with me, as leaders? Then, when we have won, if we *do* win, might I not go hence? Would that not serve as well?"

Glorian smiled faintly, and Oleric shook his head.

"Nay, my brother," the captain replied. "You must put your hands in the hands of the zinds of Ruthar and swear the oath of kingship. That is the only way. 'And the man shall be king over Ruthar and Adlaz,' runs the prophecy." Oleric traced the writing on the slab with his finger. "By those words do the zinds and the people hold. It is the only way."

"And if I refuse?"

"Then," said Glorian, "the army will not march to-morrow, nor will Zoar drive on the beasts—unless all of the prophecy shall be fulfilled. Then we who have stood as sponsors for you will be derided as cheats and fools, if, indeed, worse things do not befall you and us. And bethink you—those whom you love, who are in Adlaz, will perish miserably, while Bel-Ar and the priests of Shamar mock their miseries. Without you we fail; and without us and the hosts of Ruthar you, too, are powerless."

"You argue strongly, lady, and you, too, comrade," Polaris said. "Still, I like not

this prospect of being king. I must have a little space in which to ponder it over."

"It is now nearly noon," Oleric said. "To-day the zinds from every province and city of Ruthar ride into Zele-omaz—to greet their king. Until to-night, my brother."

"Then to-night will I give my answer—here in this hall," Polaris said, and he turned and went to seek out old Zenas Wright. And neither of the two whom he left behind could have guessed at what his answer would be, though it seemed to them that there could only be one answer. For they had come to know him as a man of surpassing determination, and here was a path in which he did not want to set his feet.

In the old laboratory Janess found Zenas. The work of the geologist was completed. Melinite he had turned out of his workshops by the ton, and the most of it had been transported carefully, and was stored in the forests near to the Kimbrian Wall. Now his thunder factory was deserted. Every last man of his force had gone to join the army.

"Yes, my lad, I know," said Zenas, after one glance at Polaris's face. "They have told you about this king business. I know, too—for I know you—that you are bucking it—hard."

"I do not want to be a king, old Zenas, but—"

"Yes, there's a 'but' in it, and a big one. What are you going to do about it? Our red-headed, two-hundred-and-fifty-year-old youngster, the antique lady, and their old father, Methuselah Zoar, have it all cut and dried. If you can see any way out of it except their way, you have devilish keen eyes. I can't, and I've been looking at it for quite a few days. Oleric told me about it all some time ago. Take it, boy; take it. And make the most of it. It isn't every day that one gets a chance to be absolute ruler over a rich country and nearly five millions of people. You'll make a better king than any they've ever had on either side of the wall. That I'll guarantee." And the old man looked at his troubled friend with bright eyes and patted him on the knee.

While they sat and talked this matter over, came a man to the door, crying out that a messenger had come through from Adlaz bringing a written word to Polaris.

The courier was brought in. He proved to be that same Rutharian who had gained a place with the prison guard under Brunar. Already he had told in the city of the destruction of the fademes of Bel-Ar, and Zele-omaz was going wild with the news.

When Polaris had read the letter sent him by Rose Emer, and he and Zenas had heard what the messenger had to add to its news, the face of the son of the snows grew very stern. The kindly old scientist's eyes were moist. After the man was gone, neither of them spoke for quite a time. The two who were gone had been dear friends, and the friendship had been knit by perils and hardships, in which each had learned the worth of the others.

"Now is the score that I have to settle with this king of Adlaz grown long indeed," Polaris said at length, "and I am minded to tilt him for his kingdom, as these folk would have me do. He made a good ending, did Minos; and I do not think that Bel-Ar, even if he come free of Ruthar, will live to see the day when another fleet shall lie ready to go out and win the world for him."

He became silent. While the town, filling up with the arrival of the zinds and their retinues, gave itself to rejoicing at the blow that had been struck Bel-Ar, and the old man sat by the fire and dozed; Polaris paced moodily up and down the long laboratory. An hour passed, and the half of another. Then he struck one hand hard into the other.

"Now in all these happenings I think I see my way at last," he muttered.

With the fall of night he cloaked himself and went up to the temple on the hill, and Zenas went with him.

From every principality and town in Ruthar the zinds had come to Zele-omaz. Those who were too old or infirm to make the journey had sent their sons or representatives. In the hall of Glorian these were gathered to the number of one hundred and seven—tall and stately men, most of

them, clad in chain armor, plated with silver and bossed with plates of steel—for they had come to fight for their king as well as to crown him. A shout went up that made the torches flare, when a guard opened one of the doors of bronze, and Polaris Janess and Zenas came into the hall.

Eager-eyed, they pressed around the son of the snows, to welcome him whom their prophets and their goddess had said would redress their ancient wrongs.

Polaris met their greetings with a heightened color and a glow in his eyes. Almost, he thought, it would be a joy to be the king of such as these—he, the dweller in no-man's land, a waif from the eternal snows.

And the Goddess Glorian, watching him from her ivory throne, smiled to herself, though there was a pang at her heart that she could not quench or still.

Presently Polaris stood in the open space at the foot of the throne. The zinds gathered before him in a glittering semicircle, and made silence in the hall.

"Chieftains of Ruthar," he began, lifting his voice so that all might hear, "this day have I been asked to become your king, to take your crown upon my head, to sit upon your throne, to lead you in battle, and to rule over you as wisely as I may—all this because of certain words on a stone which, it seems, may not be changed. Is this your wish, men of Ruthar—to have me, an outlander, as your king?"

A deep-voiced shout was the answer, and every voice said "Aye."

"Then this is my answer, men of Ruthar, seeing that there is no dissent among you: when I came unwillingly to the shores of Maeronica, there came with me a friend, a true man. You have heard much of him to-day. It was he that sunk the fademes of Bel-Ar. He was named Minos, and he was the king of a nation that has passed away. That man is dead by a glorious means. Yonder in the harbor he struck a great blow for Ruthar and for the world. He gave his life.

"To-day word reached me by the messenger who brought the tidings of that deed, and the word was that this Minos who is dead, left behind him a son, an infant newly born.

"Now I will yield me to your wishes, chieftains of Ruthar. I will go with you to the Kimbrian Wall, and beyond it. I will fight with you to overthrow Bel-Ar. I will do all that a man may to be the king you wish me. But it is my will that when this son of Minos the Sardanian is grown to manhood's years and wisdom, he shall relieve me of my kingship and become your king, and his son after him, if he have one. That is my answer, men of Ruthar. I thank you for the high honor you would do me."

He turned and bowed deeply to the Goddess Glorian, and then stood back at the side of the throne.

A murmur of surprise arose in the hall, and then was silenced, for Glorian arose to speak.

"Zinds of my people," she said in her clear, low voice, "to the weight of this man's words add that of Glorian's. He comes, this man, from a land where there are no kings. He is willing to fight for you—to die with you. What he promises will fulfil the prophecy by which we hold. It is a noble choice that he has made. It is my rede that you accept it—mine and that of Oleric the Learned, to whom you sometimes have looked for counsel."

As she reseated herself, the red captain stood forth and said simply:

"My brother has chosen well. I stand with him. Should you not agree, I still stand with him, and he and I and such as are faithful to us will break the Kimbrian Wall and perish on the road to Adlaz."

For a short time the zinds took counsel among themselves. When they had done, an aged man—he was Atra, the ruler of Zele-omaz—stood out from among them.

"We are agreed, O goddess," he said. "We will have this man as king until the prophecy is fulfilled and for so long afterward as he will, until the babe be grown to manhood. He is a true man. We are content, and perhaps"—here Atra smiled—"with the passing of the years he may change his mind."

They brought the crown of Ruthar—a heavy torque of gold set with fire-opals—

and led Polaris to the ivory throne, and set him beside the Goddess Glorian and crowned him. And he put his hands in the hands of the zinds and swore the oath of kingship.

"Yonder in Adlaz is a larger palace and a wider throne," said Glorian.

"Aye, lady," he answered. "To-morrow I shall go to seek it."

A great feast followed the coronation. When it was done, all night long, through the streets of Zele-omaz and across the bridges of Illia, sounded the rumbling of chariot-wheels and the tramp of marching feet. Ruthar was on the march at last, and the destination was the Kimbrian Wall.

So it fell out that the ambition of Minos of Sardanes had not been so vain of attainment. He had won a kingdom for "the king that was to come."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK. Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the continuation of this story without waiting a month.

The Hindoo

by

Samuel G. Camp

THE minute I laid eyes on this bird with the name like one o' them college Greek-letter societies — Eppa Japhet Kye—I knowed where he was goin' to make us trouble. Now I know you'll say I took a set against this guy because he was sent on by Dan Clarke, an' everybody knows that they's a sort o'—now—rivalry between I an' Dan as scouts for the Panthers, though I don't admit it not for one moment.

You can search me where's the rivalry between I an' Dan Clarke—get me? Maybe if he was to send up somebody sometime which was able to stick in fast company, an' which he hasn't never done yet—oh, well, maybe a few—maybe then I might be able to see this rivalry thing. But not now! Of course, some o' my own selections hasn't win out like they had ought to; but it wasn't because they wasn't able; it wasn't no lack o' judgment on my part; it was because—now—well, never mind. Anyways, I don't admit no rivalry stuff between I an' Dan Clarke.

But when one o' them bushers o' Dan's pulls a bust like each an' every one o' them is fully guaranteed to—

Well, I got a right to say "I told you so!" ain't I?

Sure I have.

So you can see plain enough that it wasn't no prejudice on my part that starts me lookin' for trouble the first time I lamp Eppa Japhet Kye. It was just a hunch—or maybe it was just Eppa Japhet.

Listen. Bone is one thing, an' brains is another; but between I an' you, you take a guy which has too much brains, one o' them ingrowin' brains that hurts him so

he's all the time conscious of it; a brain a couple o' sizes too big for his head, you might say—one o' them—now—sort o' psychological lookin' kind o' birds that looks like he was all the time studyin' what was goin' on inside him—you take a guy like that, an' I'd as lief have a bonehead anytime. I would, on the level. Solid ivory is worth more on the market any time than a lot o' gray matter in a state o' ferment.

An' you could see at a glance that the old bean bothered Eppa a lot; he looked so sort o' broodin', an' like life was real, life was earnest, an'—everythin'. See what I mean? Well, anyways I done the best I could. Plain boneheads an' just regular guys, I can hit 'em off to a hair; but these brainy birds—well, I pass. I don't feel qualified to speak—no more than you. They're out of my class.

At that, believe me, I know a ball-player when I see one, an' so, like I said, once over was enough to show me where Dan Clarke had went an' pulled another boner—which wasn't nothin' more than you could expect. I see right away where the kid which I had dug up myself, Benny Marsh, had it all over this bird Kye.

Benny wasn't no bonehead, an' he wasn't hitched to no runaway brain, neither. He was all ball-player, an' I knowed he would stick.

Y' see, it was like this:

Up to about the first of July, us Panthers an' the Maroons had run first an' second, an' the rest nowhere, in the race for the old flag—first an' second, turn an' turn about, neck an' neck. It was some race! An' us Panthers, as you might say, without gettin' hardly no hittin' a-tall. It was the pitchin' an' air-tight fieldin' kept us up there. An' the Old Man knowed we could never keep it up. The slabmen was pitchin' their head off, an' one o' these fine days the fieldin' would fall off an' stay fell, an'—there goes the old flag!

So the Old Man seen where it was a clear case o' recruitin' some hittin' ability or ten chances to one the Maroons would beat us to the wire; because when you get right down to it, things bein' equal or unequal, suit yourself, it's pastin' that old pill which cops the pennant every time! So then the Old Man gives me the office to go get a hitter, an' sends out an S. O. S. to Dan Clarke along the same line.

Well, I'd been keepin' tabs on Benny Marsh, which had been bustin' the W-I League wide open that season, an' so it took me only about four days to go get Benny an' bring him back — the Old Man was keepin' me along with the team just then, workin' with some o' the young pitchers. The chances was, one o' them recruit pitchers would be needed before long, on account o' the regulars throwin' their arm off tryin' to win without no hittin' behind 'em.

An' Dan Clarke—Dan shoots in Eppa Japhet Kye.

So them two candidates, Benny an' Eppa, one my selection an' one Dan's, both arrives about the same time; an' it looks like here is a kind o' show-down between I an' Dan Clarke, to see which one o' them birds will stick—that is, provided they was any sort o' rivalry between I an' Dan, which I haven't never admitted, an' never will.

An' you had ought to of saw the way Dan touts off Eppa Japhet to the Old Man. As near as I can remember, Dan's letter run somethin' like this:

> Well, boss, I am sending you on a hitter like you told me. This guy's name is Eppa Japhet Kye, but don't hold that against him. Take it from me, boss, this bird could bat .425 an' then some by any other name, as the bard says. An' listen, boss! I hear you got that old scoundrel, Bill Miller, stickin' round with the team, workin' with some o' the new pitchers. You know who I mean. I mean that old has-been that claims he is a baseball scout; but he wouldn't know a ball-player if he was a personal friend o' Ty Cobb's, an' why you pay him a scout's salary for pickin' lemons is by me, because fruit-pickers ain't supposed to get anywheres near what us regular scouts gets, an' so I guess you must be easy. But that's your own business.
>
> But listen, boss. This here is what I started to say: I know that just as sure as I am a foot high, this old bird, Miller, will start knockin' Eppa on sight, just because he is jealous of me for pickin' so many winners, whilst all he has ever did is drag down them little sour brothers to the orange. But don't you listen to him! He is prejudiced because he is jealous of me, an' so you can discount everythin' he says.
>
> So all I ask is, boss, that you give Eppa a fair field an' no favor; an' don't pay no attention to them slurs o' Bill Miller's, an' believe me this

guy will make good for you. Maybe Eppa is kind o' queer about some things, but which of us is perfect except Bill Miller, in his own estimation; an' I'll tell the world, boss, there ain't no faster nor superior outfielder than Eppa Kye in the big leagues, nor a better base-runner, nor one which knows more about the old pastime. An' when it comes to battin'—oh, boy! On the dead level, boss, this bird is a Hindoo with the stick! That's all I got to say. He's a Hindoo!

Well, boss, yours for a regular Brotherhood o' Baseball Scouts, one o' these fine days, an' which will bar out all such guys as this Bill Miller an' other fakers an' would-bes.

DAN CLARKE.

P. S.—You might show this letter to Bill Miller, as I kind o' wrote it about as much to Bill as to you. Anyways, give Bill my regards.—DAN.

Can you beat it?

Well, of course the Old Man showed me Dan's letter, an' says in his opinion Dan's words is—now—actionable, an' if I want to I can sue Dan for slander an' libel, an' maybe recover big damages—that is, provided I can prove the falsity o' Dan's statements; but I needn't expect no help from the Old Man.

But I says no; nix on the law! But leave it to me, if they's any such thing possible, I'll get back at this here complete letter-writer some way or my name ain't Bill Miller, an' I don't know a ball-player when I see one.

"All right," says the Old Man, "so long as you don't try to prove nothin' by me. Understand me, Bill, this is all perfectly friendly; but—now—you an' Dan Clarke—well, when it comes to knowin' a ball-player, I got my doubts about the both of you."

But anyways, I knowed they was only one way o' gettin' back at Dan Clarke so's it would hurt him, an' that was to take some money away from him. An' so a couple o' days after Eppa Japhet had joined out with the club, an' durin' which I don't lose no opportunity to size this bird up, I wire Dan Clarke, Waco, Texas, somethin' like this:

Maybe if you was to quit strainin' your eyesight writin' letters, give you time—an' twenty years is about what you got comin'—you might be able to see the difference between a ball-player an' these jokes you're all the while unloadin' on us. About this E. J. Kye. Here's one hundred iron men that says maybe this bird is a Hindoo, but he ain't no ball-player, an' he won't never last out the season.

Well, I could see from the way Dan wrote the Old Man that he was stuck on Eppa, an' so I wasn't surprised none when the answer come back:

Lots of times writin' a letter ain't near so much of a strain on you as readin' it. So thanks for your kind advice, but you better look to yourself. You made a bet.

An' so—well, that's the way things was.

But even if I hadn't judged from Eppa's looks that he was goin' to make trouble for us, I would of got the tip-off on Eppa no later than the evenin' o' the day after he joins out with us—an' I would o' got it straight from Eppa Japhet himself.

I won't say that Eppa didn't look good in the game that day, an' in the try-out the Old Man give him durin' the mornin' practise; he did, an' I'm willin' to hand it to him. For once, Dan Clarke was more or less right. That bird was sure some Hindoo with the old wood. In the mornin' practise he bumps the best pitchin' we got to all corners o' the ball lot, bang up against the fence, an' over the hills an' far away. An' in the game that day, he gets three hits out o' four times up, includin' a double an' a triple—which is hittin' some.

But Benny Marsh done most as well. The Old Man had yanked a couple o' guys which had been stickin' somethin' less than .125, an' injects both Eppa an' Benny into the pastime.

An' both of 'em made good—so far.

But that night—well, whilst we was eatin' dinner, the Old Man got to worryin' out loud about the bum umpirin' we was gettin', an' wonderin' if they wasn't somethin' we could do about it. He had ought to of knowed better. They hasn't been nothin' but bum umpirin' since the game was invented, an' nobody hasn't found the cure yet. It don't look like they's any way of improvin' the breed of umpires, an' you can't make no silk purses out o' pigskin, an' so what are you goin' to do about it?

An' so, after a while, the Old Man comes to the same conclusion. He guesses we'll just have to take what's comin' to us, an'

get back at them umpires the best way we can. Which is the way it's always been done.

"Oh, I dunno," says Eppa, "maybe if you was to concentrate on the problem you might see a light."

"Some problem!" says the Old Man. "Concentrate? Whattaya mean, concentrate?"

"Why," says Eppa, "it's like this. The trouble with most people is they don't know how to think. Clear thinkin' is one o' the rarest things what is. Most people's minds is just simply a jumble of a whole lot o' things that don't amount to nothin', an' when they go at some such problem as, say, this one about gettin' better umpirin', they don't never get nowhere with it because—"

"Take a breath!" says the Old Man.

"Because," says Eppa, "all that no-account stuff with which their head is filled keeps gettin' in the way of what they're tryin' to think about, an' so, instead o' thinkin' about what they think they're thinkin' about, they're thinkin' about somethin' else, an' so—"

"Once more!" says the Old Man, "Come up for air!"

"An' so," says Eppa, "nine times out o' ten they give up the problem without never havin' thought about it hardly a-tall. Most all the time they thought they was workin' on that problem their mind was just simply wanderin' round an' round among all that trash with which their head is filled, an' stubbin' its toe first on one thing an' then on another, an' so no wonder—"

"Sure!" says the Old Man. "I gotcha the first time. Along about the first o' the month I sit down to figure out how I'm goin' to meet all them bills. In a minute or so, the first thing I know, only I don't know it, I'm thinkin' about changin' my brand o' cigarettes or somethin'. Then, after a while, I get up, kick the cat in the slats, an' say, 'Oh, well, if them fellas think they can get blood out of a stone, let 'em go to it!' An' I ain't even decided what brand I'll change to. They's somethin' in it!"

"You bet they is!" says Eppa. "An' so, if you're goin' to do any thinkin' that amounts to anythin', the only thing for a man to do is learn how to concentrate—how to concentrate your thoughts on just the one thing you're thinkin' about, an' shove all the rest o' the fool stuff your head is filled with into the background, an' not think of nothin' only except what you're thinkin' about—see?"

"Well," says the Old Man, "I wouldn't say that you was growin' any clearer, but I guess I follow you. Sure, that's the idea—concentrate! Say, where did you get this concentrate stuff?"

"I got it out of a book," says Eppa.

Well, that was right; I seen that book a little later myself. The name of it was, 'The Bean, How It Works An' How To Work It,' or somethin' like that. No, it wasn't no—now—agricultural treatise. It was a little work o' seven hundred an' ninety-three pages an' no illustrations, dealin' with the science o' the more or less human mind. Get me? Well, anyhow, it had got Eppa Japhet Kye.

"I see," says the Old Man. "How long you been studyin' this concentration thing? Have you got so you're any good at it?"

"Well," says Eppa, "I wouldn't say I was perfect, but I'm improvin' right along. It ain't no easy trick! It takes some willpower. Y' see, when a man starts in to concentrate on somethin,' you got to make everythin' else seem like they wasn't no such thing—like it didn't exist—an' so—"

"Yeh," says the Old Man. "Sure! Well, some time when you feel like doin' a little concentratin', you might give this umpire problem a whirl."

"Maybe I might," says Eppa.

An' if you leave it to me, right there was where the Old Man made a mistake. Them bugs hadn't never ought to be encouraged.

"Some bug!" I says to the Old Man as we was leavin' the dinin'-room. "Take it from me, you're goin' to have trouble with that bird!"

"You're prejudiced!" says the Old Man. "Believe me, Bill, any little bug that can hit like that guy is the right little bug for me."

An' so—well, I seen where the Old Man had fell in a heap for Eppa Japhet. But straight goods—did you ever hear a regular ball-player pull any such stuff as that

dope o' Eppa Japhet's on the marvels an' mysteries o' the human bean? I should say not!

Anyways, it might o' been ten minutes afterward that I sent that wire to Dan Clarke, Waco, Texas.

Next mornin' when I blowed into the dinin'-room for breakfast, I seen where everybody at the tables was all lookin' in one direction, nobody wasn't eatin' a thing, an' everybody laughin' fit to kill.

Eppa Japhet Kye was occupyin' a table by his lonesome. They's breakfast enough for eight strong men spread round in front of him, but Eppa ain't eatin' nothin'. In fact, Eppa ain't doin' nothin' a-tall; you couldn't of detected no movement of any sort throughout his entire frame—it looks like he ain't even breathin'. He's froze as stiff as a pointer dog, his fork poised halfway to his mouth. His eyes is wide open an' starin' off into vacancy with about as much expression in them as they is in a couple o' door-knobs.

From the effect on them other people I guess Eppa must o' been that way for quite some time.

Well, I watched him for a minute or so, an' he still don't show no signs o' comin' out of it, whatever it was, an' so then I walks over to him an' says:

"Good mornin', Merry Sunshine!"

Eppa never bats an eye.

"Hey, you poor fish," I hollers, "snap out of it! Hear the birds sing!"

Nothin' stirrin'. Still paralyzed.

An' so then I grabs him by the neck an' shakes him back to earth.

"Aw, whaja do that for?" he says.

"Do what?" I asts.

"Bust up my train o' thought," says Eppa. "In another minute I might o' had it!"

"Had what?" I asts him.

"The answer to that umpire problem," he says.

Right then I began spendin' them hundred bucks o' Dan Clarke's.

Now, I suppose, about here I had ought to ring in Myra, the motor fan, an' which was also the hotel's official stenographer. An' maybe I had ought to tell about how Eppa Kye an' Benny Marsh both goes crazy about her, an' how she keeps the pair of 'em strapped to a nickel buyin' gasoline transportation for her; because, of course, neither one of 'em could raise the price of a car which was fit for any such regular queen as Myra to ride round in.

An' I mustn't forget about that auto ad on the center-field fence, an' which if you hit it on the head you got a Palladium Eight, complete, with electric startin' an' lightin' system, inside plumbin', steam heat, hardwood floors, an' everythin'; an' how Eppa an' Benny kept shootin' at that sign, an' it was pretty close to a cinch that the guy that copped the machine would also grab the girl; an' how—but all that can wait. They's just one or two little things I feel like I had ought to tell you about Eppa Japhet Kye—the Hindoo.

He was all o' that!

You might say that these little things was just straws which showed which way the wind was blowin'. An' so—well, one afternoon I seen a big crowd collected on the sidewalk maybe a block from the hotel.

"What's doin'?" I asts a guy in the rear row.

"Somebody throwed a fit," he says.

"Lemme through!" I says, "he's a friend o' mine."

I must o' had a hunch—it was Eppa Japhet, all right. Except that he was standin' up an' starin' down at the sidewalk, say at a point about four feet in front of him, like he was lookin' at somethin' on the walk, only they wasn't nothin' there to look at—except for that, Eppa is in the same condition like I found him that mornin' in the dinin'-room — dead to the world!

"How'd you say he got this way?" I asts a kid which is claimin' that he was there first, an' tellin' everybody all about how it happened.

"It was like this," says the kid. "They was a guy here sellin' a lot o' them little kid tricks, pasteboard hula dancers that dances on a string, an' them little Charlie Chaplins that walks off when you wind 'em up, an' diff'rent kinds o' tin animals an' things that runs round on wheels, an' everythin', an' this here guy in the hazy dream

blows along an' stops to look at 'em—they're kind o' funny to look at. They was right there on the walk where he's lookin' now.

" But pretty soon the guy that's sellin' the stuff sees where he ain't goin' to make no sales, an' moves off, an' whaddaya know? This here stiff don't seem to realize a-tall that the pedler has went, but he's been standin' there ever since, lookin' at the place where them toy things was, an' he ain't moved a muscle!"

" How long since?" I asts.

" Maybe half an hour," says the kid.

" Ain't anybody tried to wake him up?" I asts.

" Wake nothin'!" says the kid. " We been yellin' our head off at him, but that's all the good it done. But we was afraid to touch him for fear maybe he might turn vi'lent or somethin'."

" Where's the cops?" I asts.

" Where they always is," he says.

" Well," I says, " watch me!"

Maybe it might o' looked like I was murderin' Eppa, but it brung him back to earth.

" There!" he says. " You done it again!"

" Done what?" I asts.

" Butted in on me whilst I was concentratin'," he says.

" Another minute," he says, " an' I might o' been a millionaire! It was just comin' to me."

" Yeh," I says. " You bet your life they was somethin' comin' to you in another minute—here comes a cop now! Let's get out o' here!"

An' I drug him away from there.

" What was the big idea?" I asts him when we're safe. " What was just comin' to you?"

" Why," says Eppa, " a minute ago I was lookin' at some o' them mechanical toys an' things them street-pedlers sells, an' all of a sudden it come acrost me that they was a fortune in one o' them things if a man could invent it; an' so I starts in concentratin' on the thing, an' I'm just gettin' so I'm goin' good, an' an idea has almost came to me, when you go an' disturb me, an' now it's all gone! All gone! An' they was a fortune in it!"

" Well," I says, " if I've broke you, I'm sorry; an' if you need a little somethin' to tide you over till you can get started again, why, all you gotta do is say so."

" Much obliged," says Eppa, " I'll think about it."

" Do that," I says. " But don't concentrate! Don't concentrate! Anyways, not till we get back to the hotel."

Well, you can see for yourself where I saved Eppa from a pinch that time, but they was other times when he wasn't so lucky. This was just about the time when patriotism was beginnin' to run high, an' the " Star-Spangled Banner " starts throwin' Eppa for a loss. Eppa was doin' considerable concentratin' right along—mostly about money matters, I guess, on account of the high cost of indulgin' Myra, the motor fan, in her favorite pastime, when Benny Marsh didn't see her first—an' seemed like Eppa couldn't find no time or place to concentrate except where they was a band or an orchestra, an' it starts playin' the " Star-Spangled Banner," an' you are expected to stand up. But Eppa sits right there—concentratin'.

Inside o' ten days that guy starts riots in a theater, two movie houses, a restaurant, an' a roof-garden; an' believe me, scar-spangled is right for Eppa Japhet when the Old Man bails him out each time.

Then they was the time Eppa blocks the street traffic for four blocks, both ways, fallin' into one o' them concentration fits when half-way acrost the street, an' refusin' to be shook out of it for a good ten minutes. An' then they was the time when — but maybe that 'll do. I haven't only mentioned but just a few scatterin' instances, but I guess you get the idea.

An' would you believe it, the Old Man stands for it! Every time that bird pulls some of his concentration stuff I tell the Old Man where he's makin a big mistake, dependin' on any such party as Eppa Japhet Kye in a pinch like we're in with the Maroons, an' one o' these fine days, believe me, he'll regret it—but don't never say he wasn't warned, nor who warned him.

" All right," says the Old Man, " if it's a secret. You're prejudiced, Bill; an' you're talkin' just like Dan Clarke said you would.

I should worry! That guy can concentrate till he's black in the face for all I care; as long as he keeps on pastin' that old pill like he is—me for him!"

"Oh, very well!" I says. "Very well!"

At that, I wouldn't say that maybe they wasn't some excuse for the Old Man—Eppa surely did bust that pesky pill far an' regular; still, Eppa's battin' average wasn't so much better than Benny Marsh's; an' Benny Marsh — well, there was a regular ball-player without no nonsense about him! As for that, the Old Man admits it himself.

"Yes, sir, Bill," he says, "for once in your life you done gone an' dug up a ball-player. You can search me! I can't understand it!"

"Concentrate!" I says. "Concentrate!"

Them must o' been the happy days for Eppa Japhet Kye, gettin' pinched for bein' concentrated an' disorderly, gettin' bailed out by the Old Man, appearin' before the court, playin' the well-known game o' baseball, an' keepin' up with Benny Marsh in the race for the hand o' Myra, the beautiful motor fan—I never seen a girl as crazy about auto-ridin' as she was.

An'—now—that Palladium Eight ad on the center-field fence I was tellin' you about, an' which, if you knowed Myra, was likely to decide the fate of Benny or Eppa, or both, if maybe somebody else bumped it first. It was a cinch that the guy that win that car was goin' to be mighty popular with Myra.

Well, leave it to the people that builds the Palladium Eight, that sign wasn't no big mark to shoot at; but the way them two fence-busters, Benny Marsh an' Eppa Kye, keeps bumpin' 'em off the barrier right around it—well, on the level, it would give you heart failure! They was a lot o' bettin', some favorin' Eppa an' some Benny, with the odds maybe slightly on Eppa.

Oh, I admit it; as for that, I haven't never denied that Eppa Kye was a Hindoo at givin' that old pill a ride. What I claim is—but never mind.

An' maybe if it hadn't o' been for Eppa we wouldn't never o' been able to stay up there with the Maroons in the greatest race for that old flag as was ever run—first us on top an' then the Maroons, like a couple o' fighters clinched an' rollin' on the ground. Of course, take either one o' the big leagues, an' things has worked round pretty often to some mighty close finishes; but this was a race all the way.

An' when it come down to our last series with the Maroons, though they was still quite a lot o' games left to play, they wasn't one o' them newspaper baseball critics, from here to San Francisco, nor a single ball-player which knowed his business, which didn't say that this same little old seriousness would tell the story; an' they was right. I knowed it myself, an' so did the Old Man.

An' old George W. Public—well, he was wise to the situation, too; an' at each an' every one o' them games—it was a five-game serious, with us Panthers just a shade the best in the bettin', because the games was played on our home grounds—at every one o' them games Mister G. W. Public overflows the stands right up to the baselines. An' believe me, old George was crazy! Well, I seemed to feel, myself, like somethin' out o' the ordinary was goin' on; an' as for the Old Man, I never seen him so worked up over the old pastime in my life. Why—but let's go!

You can take it straight from Bill Miller, that serious would o' give a tailor's dummy the duck-flutters! Crucial wasn't no name for it; it was that when it started, an' it kept gettin' more so all the way; it got so crucial that we was tied up—two games apiece.

But when the last half o' the ninth, in the fifth game, opens up with the scoreboard showin' Panthers 1, Maroons 2, an' Eppa Japhet Kye first up—well, judge for yourself.

We need one to tie, two to win, an'—

Eppa triples! *Boy!*

Well, anyways, it looks now, with nobody down, like we're sure to tie 'em.

But the next two batters whiffs — an' Benny Marsh comes up. Just one little old single will bring in Eppa an' give us another lease o' life.

Benny passes up a couple o' bad ones, an' then—*bam!*

A single? It's a sure-enough three-bag-

ger, an' the chances is all that Benny can stretch it to a homer! Anyways, the worst we can get is a tie. But is it?

I guess Eppa must o' got the line o' that hit o' Benny's about as soon as anybody—a bee-line for the Palladium Eight ad—an' as he trots toward the home plate, believe me, Eppa keeps an eye on that ball!

Benny is tearin' round the bases.

An' Eppa, I should say, is about halfway to the plate when the pill bumps that Palladium sign plumb center — an' Eppa comes to a full stop!

An' they've started relayin' the ball!

Talk about life in the big leagues! Us Panthers rushes out from the bench in a bunch, yellin' our head off at Eppa. But we're too late. D' you get it? Eppa has started concentratin' on how this little incident o' Benny Marsh's coppin' that Palladium Eight, complete, is goin' to affect his chances with Myra, the motor fan, an'—it's all off!

They could o' relayed the ball from Nome, Alaska, before we could o' shook Eppa Japhet Kye back to his senses—even if we could o' laid hands on him, which, of course, we couldn't, him bein' a runner.

The ball gets home; Benny slides into third; an', if you want to be technical, Eppa is forced for the third out.

An' there goes the ball game!

That's pretty near all. Of course I wouldn't of liked nothin' better than to tell the Old Man I told him so. But I didn't. I didn't say nothin' to him a-tall. It wasn't safe.

The Old Man didn't lose no time askin' for waivers on Eppa Japhet Kye. Nor me in wirin' Mister Dan Clarke, Waco, Texas:

Hindoo is right! When it comes to the trance stuff, no Yogi has nothin' on E. J. Kye! You lose.

Benny—him an' Myra gets married an' lives happily for a quite a while afterward in the Palladium Eight.

FREE IN THE STARSHINE

BY MARGARET G. HAYS

OUT of the weight of the tethering clay,
After the burden and heat of the day,
Over the clustering roofs of the town,
Wafting like fluff of the dandelion down,
Dancing and flying, joyous and free,
Rapturous, glad goes the spirit of Me.
Over the roofs, caring not what they hide—
Suffering, happiness, humbleness, pride—
Into the ether, careless and free—
Mad with delight goes the spirit of Me.

Sleep, heavy body, sleep on, and rest,
Poor mortal hulk by much labor oppressed;
Lo, with the dawning I will return,
Now I am free—free to fly, free to turn;
One with the starshine, gleefully free,
Tosses and floats the glad spirit of Me.
Just one bright, white star of grateful delight
Free till the morning. Thank God for the night!

Faulkner's Folly

by Carolyn Wells

Author of "The Curved Blades," etc.

CHAPTER XVII.

ALAN FORD.

JOYCE went up to Natalie's room and found the girl sitting up in bed trying to eat some of the dainty breakfast a maid had just brought her. A cap of lace and tiny rosebuds confined the gold hair, and a breakfast jacket of pale blue brocade was round her shoulders.

"Joyce," she said, staring at her with big blue eyes, "where did those jewels come from?"

"I don't know, Natalie. It's the most mysterious thing I ever heard of. But listen, dear, I've something to tell you. Barry has confessed—"

"What!" Natalie almost shrieked the word. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I say. Barry has confessed that he killed his father. You suspected him all the time, didn't you?"

"Did you?"

"Oh, I couldn't—and yet who else could it have been? I did think of Barry at first, and then I decided it couldn't be."

"And then you suspected me?"

"Oh, Natalie, how can I say? I did and I didn't. I had no notion which way to turn. But now, even though he says so, I can't believe it was Barry."

"Barry! Of course it wasn't Barry!"

"But he confessed, Natalie."

"Of course he confessed. He couldn't help it!" As she spoke, Natalie was getting out of bed, and seating herself at her dressing-table, began to do up her hair. "If you don't mind going, Joyce, I want to dress. Run along now, I'll be down soon."

"What are you going to do?" Joyce looked at the girl uncertainly, for she was brushing her hair with unwonted vigor. Her eyes were tear-filled, but her face showed a brave, determined expression, and she hurried her toilet as if important matters impended.

"Go now, Joyce," and rising, Natalie pushed her gently toward the door.

Some minutes later, Natalie came downstairs in a trim out-of-door costume. Her smart little hat was veiled, and she had a motor coat over her arm.

"May I take the little coupé, Joyce, and drive it myself?"

"Why, yes, of course. Where are you going?"

"First, to see Mr. Roberts. And if I'm not home for some hours, don't be alarmed. I may go to—well, I may take a long drive. But I'll be back to dinner."

In a moment Joyce saw the little electric coupé whirling down the drive.

Straight to police headquarters Natalie went, and found Bobsy Roberts.

"Barry Stannard didn't kill his father," she said, without preamble. "You had no right to arrest him."

"But he confessed the crime, Miss Vernon."

"Don't you know why he did that?" The lovely eyes fell before Bobsy's surprised glance.

"No, why? If he is not the criminal?"

"Of course he isn't. He said all that to —to save me."

Bobsy looked sharply at her. "Is that so? And how am I to know that you're not telling me this to save him?"

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for September 8.

"You can't know! That's just it. You have not wit enough to know what is the truth and what isn't."

"Thank you for the implied compliment."

"Don't be sarcastic. This isn't the time for it. Please help me, Mr. Roberts."

It would have been a far less impressionable man than the detective who could have refused the pleading glance of those pansy-blue eyes.

"How can I help you, Miss Vernon?"

"This way. Tell me of some detective, some really great one, who can unravel this tangle. I didn't kill Mr. Stannard. Barry didn't, either. But he says he did to save me. Now, I want some one who can find the real criminal and so clear both Barry and myself."

"And you expect me to recommend somebody?"

"Oh, I do, Mr. Roberts, I do. I know you're big enough and honest enough to admit that you are at the end of your rope, and if you know of any one—I don't care how much he costs, I must have him—I *must!* Tell me, won't you?"

"Yes, I'll tell you, because I can't refuse you, but also because I know he will only verify our conclusions. You must know, Miss Vernon, we've had our eye on young Stannard all the time."

"Oh, I thought you were sure the criminal must be Mrs. Stannard or myself."

"We did think that at first—you see, we have to think what the evidence shows."

"Well, never mind that now. Who is this man you have in mind?"

"Alan Ford. He's not one of the story-book wizards, but he's a big light in the detective field, and he can find out if any one can."

"Where is he?"

Bobsy gave her the New York address of the detective and Natalie rose to go. Then, acting on a sudden impulse, "Come with me," she said.

"To New York?" cried the amazed Bobsy.

"Yes. It's only a couple of hours' run, and I don't want to go alone."

"Why, I'm glad to go, if I can arrange it."

"Do arrange it. I want you so much."

Now, when a little flower-faced girl looks pleadingly out of heavenly-colored eyes, and her red mouth quivers with fear of being refused, few men have the power to say no. Anyway, Bobsy hadn't, and he managed to "arrange" it, and in a few moments they were on their way.

"I thought you'd want to see Stannard," he said.

"No, I'd rather not, until I see if I can get the great Mr. Ford."

The little car ate up the miles, and soon they were in the crowded streets of the city.

Alan Ford was in his office, and received them with his characteristic quiet dignity.

The tall, big man looked taller than ever as he stood beside the petite model, his gray eyes looking down into her eager blue ones.

"What can I do for you?" he asked kindly, and smiled at her because he couldn't help it. The winsome face made everybody smile from sheer gladness of looking at it.

"Can you take a case, Mr. Ford? An important murder case?"

"The Stannard case?"

"Yes."

"I'd like to say yes, but I am just starting on a Western trip, and I shall be gone at least a month."

Great crystal tears formed in Natalie's eyes and one rolled down her cheek. She couldn't possibly help this, the tear-drops were beyond her control. But they stood her in good stead, for Alan Ford couldn't bear to see a woman cry. It unnerved him as no danger or terror could do.

"Don't, please," he said impulsively.

"But I'm so disappointed! You see Barry Stannard has confessed—"

"What! Young Stannard confessed! Then what do you want of me?"

"Because Barry didn't do it. He confessed to save me."

"And did you do it?" The question was in the tone of a casual every-day inquiry, but few people would have replied anything but the truth with Alan Ford's gaze upon them.

"No, I didn't. You *must* come up there and find out who did do it. Oh, can't you manage somehow?"

The coaxing face was brightened by a sudden hope, and Alan Ford couldn't bring himself to dash that hope from the lovely, beseeching girl.

"It makes a difference, now that they've arrested Stannard," he said slowly.

"Oh, of course it does! Arrested him wrongfully, too. You see, he had to say he did it, or I would have been arrested."

"Tell me the main facts," said Ford to Bobsy. And in straightforward terms, Bobsy told the great detective all that the force had been able to accomplish.

"It would seem," said Alan Ford, speaking with deliberation, "that the criminal must be one of the four people most nearly connected with the dead man. His wife, Miss Vernon here, Barry, the son, or Mr. Courtenay, the lover."

"I don't like you to use that term," said Natalie gently. "For Mr. Courtenay and Mrs. Stannard could not be called lovers during Mr. Stannard's life."

"Good for you, for standing up for her! Well, I will postpone my Western trip for a few days at least."

"He's coming," said Natalie briefly, as in the late afternoon she arrived at the Folly.

"Who is?" asked Joyce. "And where have you been?"

Joyce and Beatrice were having tea in the reception-room, for by common consent all the household avoided the studio.

The servants shuddered as they were obliged to pass it or go through it and Natalie declared it was haunted.

"I've been to New York," the girl replied, as she flung off her motor-coat and threw herself into a big armchair. "Give me some tea, please, and I'll tell you all about it. I've engaged Alan Ford."

"Who is he?" asked Beatrice, fixing a cup of tea as Natalie liked it.

"He's a great, big, splendid detective—I mean big in his profession—and he's also the biggest man I ever saw, physically."

"Well, I am glad!" exclaimed Joyce. "I think Mr. Roberts has done all he could, but I don't think he has much real cleverness. Do you, Beatrice?"

"No. And yet we oughtn't to judge him too harshly. He's had a hard time of it, for every new bit of evidence he gets, or thinks he gets, seems to point to some one of the family here."

"I know it," agreed Natalie, "but Alan Ford will find the real murderer and then we'll all be freed of suspicion."

"What's that, Natalie? Alan Ford?" And into the room strode Barry Stannard.

Natalie's face shone with welcome. "How did you get here?" she cried; "I thought you were arrested!"

"Even a murder suspect can get bail if he has money enough," said Barry, "and there were other reasons. They wouldn't swallow my confession whole. But never mind that now; tell me, did you say Alan Ford is coming?"

"I did, Barry dear. I went and got him. And just in time, too, for he was going West at once. But he's staying over for us, and he's coming out here to-morrow morning. Isn't it fine?"

"Splendid! You're a trump, Natalie. You know, girl, don't you, why I confessed?"

"Of course I do. I was sure you couldn't make the police believe you, and then I knew it would swing back to me. So I had to take desperate measures, and I did."

"Barry," said Joyce, "your attempts to get suspicion turned your way or any way are too transparent. You scratched up the window-frame to make it appear a burglar had entered there, and nobody believed it for a minute."

"I know it; I'm no good as a deceiver. But, oh, Natalie, don't think I suspected you, but I knew others would, and did, and I was frantic. And I vowed I did it, in an effort to distract their attention from you. But your going yourself for Ford clears you in every one's eyes, and now he'll find the man. It was some man who came in—it has to be. There is no other explanation—positively none."

"It wasn't Eugene!" whispered Joyce, her face drawn with new apprehension.

"Of course it wasn't," said Beatrice soothingly. "Don't worry over that, Joyce dear. Mr. Wadsworth has exculpated Mr. Courtenay."

"But nothing seems sure," Joyce said.

"Well, it will be sure, once Alan Ford gets here," declared Barry. "I can hardly wait to see him."

Alan Ford arrived the next morning. When he entered the reception-room his tall, commanding presence seemed to fill the whole room. With perfect courtesy, he greeted Joyce first, and then the others, and finally seated himself, facing the group.

Though not to be called handsome, his face was fine and scholarly, and his iron-gray hair made him older than his fifty years. His manner was quiet, but alert, as if no hint or lightest word could escape his attention.

"Let us waste no time," he began, "for my business engagements are pressing, and what I do here must be done as quickly as possible. I can promise you nothing, for the accounts I have read of this case make it seem to me that your local workers have done all that could be expected of them. The whole affair is mysterious, but sometimes a new point of view or the opinions of a different mind may lead to something of importance."

"You know the main details, then?" asked Barry.

"The main details as told in the papers, yes. Also, I've seen Mr. Roberts this morning, and I've discussed matters with him, and with Captain Steele. But never mind those sources of information. I want the stories of each one of you here. And, if you please, I want them separately, and in each instance, alone. Otherwise, I cannot take the case."

"Why, of course, Mr. Ford," said Joyce, "we will agree to anything you stipulate. Please direct us, and we will obey."

"Then, first, I will talk with Mr. Stannard, and later with the ladies. Also, I must ask that the interviews be in the studio, the room where the crime took place. This is not only because it is more appropriate, but I can think better in a large room. This little low-ceiled box of a room doesn't give me space to think!"

Ford's winsome smile took all hint of rudeness from the words, and as he rose, his great height and proportionate bulk seemed to bear out his statement, and the assumption that his mind was of wide scope and far-reaching limits, made it seem plausible that he felt stifled in a small or low room.

"But you haven't yet been in the studio," said Natalie. "How do you know it is big and high?"

"It was so described in the newspaper accounts. That is why I took an interest in the case. Also, I am willing to admit, I paused for a glance in at the studio door as I came into the house, and before I entered this room."

"A queer man," thought Natalie. "Why should a great detective talk about such foolish details as large or small rooms? Why should he take an interest in a case because of them?"

The others had similar thoughts, but no comment was made on the visitor's peculiarities, save that Beatrice Faulkner seemed to feel obliged to defend her husband's architectural ideas.

"The rooms are carefully proportioned," she said pleasantly, but with a touch of pride in the fact. "The architect who designed them knew just what measurements were most effective from a technical and artistic point of view."

"The rooms are all right," said Mr. Ford, smiling kindly at the speaker, "the trouble is with my own foolish vagaries."

Then led by Barry, they all went into the studio.

Alan Ford looked around him with the most intense admiration expressed on his fine face.

"Magnificent!" he said. "Mrs. Faulkner, your late husband was indeed a genius. I have never seen a more perfectly proportioned room, or one more appropriately and effectively decorated. The windows are marvels and the furniture is in every respect fitting."

"Oh," said Joyce, "Mr. Stannard furnished the room. It was not built for a studio."

"It is, then, the joint product of two geniuses. I know of Mr. Stannard's reputation."

For a few moments Alan Ford seemed to forget the errand on which he had come. He was, it was plain to be seen, deeply impressed with the beautiful apartment,

and his dark, deep-set gray eyes roved about from pictures to statues, from furniture to decorations with admiring and approving gaze.

"Have you a picture of Mr. Stannard?" he asked at last.

"Yes," and Joyce took a photograph from a small chest full of portraits. "This is a photograph of a painting done by himself. It was made about four years ago, but he changed little since."

Ford took the card and studied it. He saw a noble head and brow, fine features, and a general air of self-appreciation that was, however, not to be called conceit. The mouth had a few weak lines about its corners, but on the whole it was the presentment of a man of genius.

"Have you a photograph of the subject in life," he asked; "not taken from a painting?"

"Yes, but not a recent one," replied Joyce. "Except for some little snap-shots," and she put a half-dozen small pictures in the hands of the detective.

"Better yet," Ford said, and he carefully scrutinized the papers.

But all the pictures of Eric Stannard gave the same impression of power, self-confidence, and dominance.

CHAPTER XVIII.

QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS.

STILL studying the face of the artist, Alan Ford indicated his desire to begin the successive interviews with the members of the household. All but Barry left the room, and the young man sat down near the absorbed detective.

"Your father was a handsome man," Ford said, as he laid aside the pictures.

"Yes," agreed Barry. "I wish I might have been more nearly his type."

"Physically, you mean?"

"Yes, and mentally, too. I admit my father's moral weakness, yet he was not a bad man, as men go. His artistic temperament was responsible for his being blamed far more than was just or right."

"That is probably true," said Ford, seriously. "To a man of that sensitiveness of beauty many things seemed right that were not. Now, Mr. Stannard, will you please tell me everything about the actual facts as you know them, regarding the hour or half-hour in which the crime was committed? Don't shade or color your story to shield Miss Vernon, for such a bias will only prejudice my judgment against her. Tell me exactly the events as they followed one another to your positive knowledge, and nothing more."

"Very well, Mr. Ford, I will do just as you ask. But let me say this first; there are three suspects—"

"Excuse me, there are four suspects."

"If you count Mr. Courtenay, yes. But the three in the house, my stepmother, Miss Vernon, and myself, have been definitely suspected, and probably are still. So I want to say, that if one of us must remain under suspicion, let it be me. It is impossible that a woman did this deed. So investigate along the line of Courtenay or myself, but as I feel quite sure you can get no real evidence against him, use me for a scapegoat, while you are finding the real criminal."

"Then you are not the criminal, Mr. Stannard?"

"If I were, would I be apt to tell you?"

"You couldn't help telling me. Not in words, but in manner, in glance, in intonation, in a dozen ways, over which you have no control."

"Have I told you so?"

"You have not. I know positively you did not kill your father. But, go on, please, with your recital."

"Well, after dinner, Miss Vernon and I sat on the terrace—" Barry paused. "By Jove," he broke out, "how can I tell you the straight truth? It sounds exactly as if Natalie did it!"

Alan Ford almost smiled at the boy's impetuous exclamation, but merely prompted him: "Yes. Go right on, remember the truth will help Miss Vernon more than any falsehood possibly could. Have you never heard of seemingly incriminatory evidence of one leading straight to another?"

"All right, then. We sat there a long time, and then we talked about—about getting married. I was bothered about it, for

dad had vowed if I married Natalie he'd cut me out of his will."

"That's why you altered the will in Miss Vernon's favor?"

"I didn't alter that will! This is man to man, now, Mr. Ford. I'm telling you the truth. I didn't change that will, and Miss Vernon didn't, either. I don't know who did."

"We'll find that out. It won't be a great surprise to learn the truth about that."

"How do you know it won't? Do you know who did the forgery?"

"I think so. Or perhaps there wasn't any forgery. But go on, my dear boy, with your story. I told you, you know, I've not much time to give you."

"All right. We talked about getting married, and I got awful mad and said if father did not stop his nonsense with her, I'd kidnap her and run away. And Natalie knew that if we did that, dad would cut us both out of his will—and she isn't a bit mercenary, it wasn't that."

"What was it, then?"

"Why, only that we're—why, hang it all, decent people don't do those things."

"Decent people don't commit murder, either," said Ford, very gravely.

"No, I know that. Well, Natalie begged me not to quarrel with father—said she could manage him herself. I thought she meant by being sweet to him, and all that, and I got mad at her, and—I walked off and left her there."

"Without a word?"

"No. I told her I was going to give the dogs a run. I was going to, too, but as I walked away, I fell a thinking, and I just strolled round the place alone."

"Whom did you see?"

"Nobody at all. Maybe Courtenay, or Mr. Wadsworth, or some of those people passed me, I don't know. I was just thinking about Natalie, and then Halpin came running out and told me to come in the house, my father was ill."

"And you went right in?"

"Yes, and when I saw what had happened, I felt afraid Natalie had killed him—and I ran out and tried to make the window-frame look as if a burglar had broken in. I suppose it was foolish."

"It certainly was. But I don't blame you. It was natural to try to shield the girl you loved from possible suspicion."

"Possible suspicion! I you had seen the situation! There were the two women, both shivering with fear and terror, and there was the dead or dying man between them! Why, Mr. Ford, it wasn't suspicion, it was certainty that one or the other had stabbed him!"

"And why have you changed your mind since?"

"Partly because of that clairvoyant person. I don't believe in those things, but—well—do you?"

"I do not. But I can see how she would turn suspicion away from the two women in question. Who sent for the clairvoyant?"

"Mrs. Stannard did, but, first, the priestess, as she likes to be called, wrote and asked for a séance."

"She did! How did she know she was wanted?"

"She didn't know. Said she read about the case, and got interested."

"Ah, a professional medium."

"She said not. Said she only offers to help in cases that appeal especially to her."

"H-m. Well, then she turned all your thoughts toward Mr. Courtenay, I am told."

"But she didn't intend to. I mean, she described a man who entered the room, and who stabbed my father, but it was Bobsy Roberts's questions that made anybody think of Eugene Courtenay."

"How?"

"Oh, he kept saying, Bobsy did, 'Has he a pointed beard?' and 'Is he tall and dark?' and such leading hints. The woman said 'Yes' every time, but I don't believe she knew what she was talking about."

"And her mysterious reading of those sealed papers? You see, I know all the main facts, I just want your opinions."

"Well, you've got me there! That woman *had* to read those by supernatural power, because there's no other explanation. I know a bit about legerdemain and parlor magic, and there was no opportunity whatever for any trickery. We wrote the things, sealed them, Bobsy Roberts collected them and handed them to her. Then

in the same instant he switched off the light, and it wasn't half a minute before she was reading them aloud to us."

"In the dark?"

"Absolutely dark. And she hadn't moved from her chair, for her voice came from the place she was sitting."

"Ventriloquism?"

"Oh, no. Not a chance. Anyway, where could she go to have a light? The studio doors were all closed, and—why, of course, she didn't leave her chair, for when Bobsy switched on the light suddenly, there she sat, eyes closed, hands quiet, composed and unruffled. No, sir, there is no explanation for that reading business but honest-to-goodness second sight! And, she gave us back our envelopes intact, seals unbroken."

"Well, but, Mr. Stannard, if she had power to do all that, and I don't doubt your word in the least particular, isn't it strange that she couldn't see exactly who that murderer was?"

"Suppose it was some one she didn't know?"

"But oughtn't her powers of second sight, if she had such, reveal to her the identity of the man? She didn't know what was in your envelopes, but she told you. Why didn't her supernatural powers inform her of the man's name?"

"I don't know, Mr. Ford. I'm only telling you what I saw and heard."

"That's all I want." And after a short further conversation, Alan Ford dismissed Barry and asked Mrs. Stannard to come to him next.

"It will be hard for you, I know," he said gently, as he placed a chair for her, "but I want you to tell me just what occurred at the time of Mr. Stannard's death. Tell only your own part, only what you, yourself, did or saw."

"You suspect I killed my husband?" said Joyce, in a choking whisper.

"It will depend on your story what I suspect. Do not be afraid, and do not distrust me, Mrs. Stannard. I want to help you, in any case. Whatever the truth, I can help you, and I want to assure you of that."

The infinite gentleness of his tone, the kind light in his eyes and the utter sympathy evident in his whole manner, reassured Joyce, and in a low voice she began:

"I have told it so many times, I know it by heart. I was in the billiard-room with Mr. Courtenay. I will not explain or defend the fact that I was there alone with him, but merely state that I was. He left me, and as I was heart-sick over my own private and personal affairs, I buried my head in a sofa-cushion and cried. Not a real crying spell of sobs and tears, but an emotion which I endeavored to restrain or control that I might meet others without causing comment. As I bowed my head there, I am positive I heard my husband talking to some woman."

"Miss Vernon?"

"I thought so at first, now I am not sure it was she."

"Mrs. Faulkner?"

"Oh, no. She was in the drawing-room at the other end of the house. No, it must have been either my imagination or some woman who had somehow entered and who afterward disappeared."

"Go on."

"I heard him say, or I thought I did, that she could have the emeralds, but he refused to marry her."

"Yes," a little impatiently. "I know about that. Tell me what happened."

"Then I heard a strange, gasping sound, and I rushed in—"

"Was the room light then?"

"No, dark. The light went out that instant or a moment before. I rushed in, and heard a sound opposite—on the other side of the room. At first I thought it was my husband, but it was a quick, frightened breathing, and then the light flashed on, and I saw it was Miss Vernon, huddled against the wall—no, against a small table, and looking scared to death. Do you wonder that I thought she had done something wrong? For just then I caught sight of my husband, stabbed, dying—oh, I knew in that first glance that he had been murdered. Then, I saw Blake and Mrs. Faulkner at the other end of the room. They were shocked and frightened, too, but I paid no attention to them, I looked right back to Eric. And he—well, the footman

did ask him who did it—and he raised his hand and said, 'Neither Natalie nor Joyce.'"

"Are you sure that's what he said?"

"I am sure now. At the time he said it, he spoke so thickly I could scarcely understand him, and I thought he said, 'Natalie, not Joyce.' But we had a clairvoyant here, and she said he said 'nor,' and then I realized at once that that was what he did say!"

"Meaning, of course, that you two women were innocent, and that some other hand had struck the blow?"

"Yes, that was what he meant."

"And, do you not think, Mrs. Stannard, that he would have said that to shield you both, even if one had been guilty?"

Joyce Stannard turned white. "I—I never thought of that," she stammered. "Perhaps he would."

"But you feel sure, at this moment, that it was not Miss Vernon who killed your husband?"

Joyce looked utterly miserable. Her eyes were frightened like those of a hunted animal. But she said bravely: "I feel sure of that Mr. Ford. Miss Vernon is not one who could do such a thing."

"She doesn't seem to be. Will you go now, Mrs. Stannard, and please send Miss Vernon in here?"

Joyce went slowly out of the studio, and in a moment Natalie Vernon came in.

"Am I afraid of you?" she asked, as she sat facing Alan Ford. "Need I be?"

Her questions were not prompted by coquetry, that was evident. Her tone was serious, and she looked at the detective wistfully.

"No, Miss Vernon," he answered, seriously, "you have no reason to be afraid of me, but I will tell you frankly, you have great reason to fear the consequences if you tell me anything but the exact truth. Pardon me if that seems a rude speech, but great issues are at stake, and prevarication on your part to the slightest degree would baffle all my plans and hopes."

"I will tell the truth," Natalie sighed, "so far as I know it. But sometimes it's very hard to be sure of what is true."

"Yes, I know it. Now, Miss Vernon, just one word about the time and scene of the crime. When you came into the studio, because you heard—what did you hear?"

Alan Ford's manner was calculated to set the nervous girl at her ease, and his kindliness made her calm and unselfconscious.

"I heard Eric moan."

"Did you know at once it was Mr. Stannard?"

"Oh, yes. It sounded like him, and I supposed he was in there."

"What did you think ailed him?"

"I don't believe I thought of that. I just heard the curious, gasping sound, as of somebody choking, and I ran in. I didn't think—I only wondered what was the trouble."

"And when you entered the room, was it light or dark?"

"Honestly, I don't know, Mr. Ford. I've been so quizzed and questioned about it, that I can't seem to remember clearly."

"But the lights went out?"

"Yes, as I entered, or just before."

"Well, then, what was the first thing you saw?"

"Must I tell that?"

"Yes, and truly."

"Then, the first thing I saw, as the light flashed on—and it rather blinded me at first, you know. You see, I had been sitting on the terrace, which was almost dark, then I entered the dark room, and so, when the light came suddenly it dazled me, and naturally I looked straight ahead of me. I saw Mrs. Stannard, behind her husband, and near the billiard-room door."

"As if she had just come in from that room?"

"I think so—now. I didn't think so then. I thought she had killed him, and had sort of stepped back, you know—"

"Why did you change your mind?"

"Oh, because of Mme. Orienta. Haven't you heard about her? She cleared up the mystery, as far as Joyce—Mrs. Stannard—and I are concerned."

"Yes, I've heard all about her. You believe in her supernatural powers?"

"Oh, yes. Only I don't use that word. I call them psychic powers."

"But it was supernatural to read the sealed messages as she did?"

"Well, I suppose it was. I suppose clairvoyance is supernatural, but we psychics prefer other terms. You know, I'm a psychic."

"Ah, is that so? And you can read sealed messages in the dark?"

"No, indeed, I can't. I wish I could. But perhaps I shall be able to some day. I can—Mr. Ford, don't you believe me?"

Natalie looked at him, and a slight flush came to her pale cheek as she saw his slightly quizzical expression.

"Miss Vernon, I believe all you've said, so far. I want to continue my confidence in your statements, so please be very careful not to exaggerate or overcolor the least mite. Now, just to what extent do you *know* you're a psychic? Not imagine or hope or think, but *know*."

"Well, I only know that I've heard the voice of Mr. Stannard's spirit since his death as clearly as I heard his mortal voice that night he died."

"You are sure of this?"

"I am sure, Mr. Ford."

"Tell me the exact circumstances."

CHAPTER XIX.

FORD'S DAY.

"MRS. STANNARD and I were alone, here in the studio—"

"Where was Mr. Stannard?"

"I don't know. He wasn't in the house."

"Was Mrs. Faulkner?"

"Yes, but she wouldn't stay here with us. She doesn't approve of any of these psychic investigations, but she doesn't say much against them, out of respect to Mrs. Stannard's and my wishes."

"Go on."

Natalie told the story of hearing faint groans, as of a dying man, and of the sudden extinguishing of the lights.

"One moment, Miss Vernon. When the lights went out, the room was quite still, was it not?"

"Deathly silent, Mr. Ford. Joyce and I were breathless, listening for further sounds of any sort."

"And, tell me, did you hear the click of the switch as the light went out?"

"Yes, I did. I heard it distinctly."

"And did that mean nothing to you?"

"Why, what could it mean?"

"It meant, Miss Vernon, that the light was switched off by a mortal, flesh and blood hand. Had it been supernaturally extinguished there would have been no sound."

"I heard it—I'm sure I heard it. But I think the spirit of Mr. Stannard haunts the whole room, and it was he who turned the light off."

"By means of a material switch?"

Natalie looked a little uncertain. Varying expressions passed over her face as she thought it out. Then she said, "Don't spirits ever use material means?"

"Not to my individual knowledge," returned Alan Ford gravely. "I fear, Miss Vernon, your belief in the spiritual influences at work in this affair is about to be rudely shattered. Now, did you hear any other sound—a click or thud—after the light went out?"

"No. You see, Joyce—Mrs. Stannard—jumped right up and ran across the room and turned on the light."

"Turned it on? It had been really turned off, then?"

"Oh, yes. And she turned it on. Then she opened the door and Blake was in the hall, where he belonged. He had seen no one and had heard nothing."

"I must have a chat with Blake. And Mrs. Faulkner, she knew nothing of it all?"

"Not till Mrs. Stannard told her. She ran at once to Mrs. Faulkner's room—"

"Where is that room?"

"At the other end of the house, on the third floor. And there she found Mrs. Faulkner writing letters. And Mrs. Stannard told her and they came down-stairs together. Well, and after Mrs. Stannard left the room, of course, I looked around, and there was the case of jewels on the table."

"Where did they come from? How did they get there?"

"The spirit of Mr. Stannard placed them there," said Natalie solemnly. "You may scoff, Mr. Ford, you may suspect Blake of being mixed up in it, but you're all wrong. The studio doors were locked—"

"While you and Mrs. Stannard were in there?"

"Yes, I locked them myself. All three. There are but three, you know. See, the one to the front hall, the outside one to the terrace and the one to the billiard-room. I locked them, and the windows were fastened, too. Nobody mortal could have come into that room."

"So it would seem. Now, who else has these leanings toward spirit forces beside you? Who sent for the clairvoyant lady?"

"Nobody. That is, she wrote herself to Mrs. Stannard, asking if she might come."

"You liked her? You believed in her?"

"In Orienta? Oh, yes. She is not an ordinary person—I mean she is refined, educated, cultured—as correct in every way as we are ourselves. She's not a professional medium, you know."

"I know. And did Mr. Barry Stannard want her to come?"

"No; he strongly opposed it."

"And Mrs. Faulkner?"

"She deferred to Mrs. Stannard's wishes. But she had no faith in her. Of course, after Orienta read the sealed letters, Mrs. Faulkner had to believe in that, she couldn't well help it."

"No. Now, Miss Vernon, when you heard the groan or sigh as if the spirit of Mr. Stannard were expressing itself, where did the sound come from?"

"It seemed to come from that chair—the chair he died in. Joyce and I sat facing it—"

"Your backs to the hall door, then?"

"Yes, but nobody could open that door, it was locked. Mrs. Stannard unlocked it when she ran out of the room."

"You're sure of this?"

"Positive. We've gone over the scene a dozen times or more."

"That seems to let Blake out, doesn't it? Well, that's all for the present, Miss Vernon, and thank you for your courteous attention. Now, there's no one to interview but the servants."

"Mrs. Faulkner? She expects you to talk to her, I think."

"What could she tell me? She wasn't in this part of the house at the spiritual séance, and as to the moment of the crime, she tells no more than Blake. However, I'll see her for a brief interview. It's always well to get all the accounts possible."

Natalie left the studio, and in a few moments Beatrice Faulkner came in.

"Just a question or two, Mrs. Faulkner," said Ford. "I know you people are all nearly distraught with these strange and sudden developments. But, tell me, what do you thing of Miss Vernon's story of the spirit manifestations in this room?"

"I think it was all the girl's imagination, Mr. Ford. She is not only of an exaggerated artistic temperament, but excessively nervous and susceptible to hallucinations."

"She is all that, I think. Now, please tell me, very honestly and very carefully, exactly how Mrs. Stannard looked and acted when she ran up to your room to tell you of the strange occurrence in the studio."

"She was terribly excited, Mr. Ford, and she could scarcely speak. She stumbled up the stairs—"

"Why, did you see her?"

"No, I heard her. I was at my writing-desk and the house was still. Then she flew into my room, without knocking—"

"Is it her custom to knock?"

"Oh, yes, she always does. And she begged me to go down-stairs with her, and I did. The rest you know?"

"Yes, and a strange tale it is. How do you suppose the jewels came to be on that table?"

"I cannot say." Beatrice looked sad. "There seems to be only one explanation. That whoever had them or knew where they were placed them there."

"And how did the bearer of the box get into the locked room?"

"I can't imagine. The only thing I can think of is that Natalie didn't lock the door as thoroughly as she thinks she did."

"Mrs. Faukner, tell me this. I assure you I will not use your information unless absolutely necessary. Do you suspect the footman, Blake, of any connivance—or of any wrong-doing in the whole matter?"

Beatrice Faulkner hesitated. Then she said, "No, Mr. Ford, I do not. I think Blake an honest and trustworthy servant."

"And who is the criminal?"

"That I cannot say. I am, as you know, merely a visitor, who chanced to be here at this unfortunate time. I have hesitated to express my opinions lest I do harm to the innocent or retard the quest of the guilty. I can only answer your questions in so far as they are not leading up to suspicion of any of my friends."

"That is the right attitude, Mrs. Faulkner. I thought there was no necessity for troubling you at all, but one or two minor points I prefer to ask of you rather than Mrs. Stannard. Do you know the identity of 'Goldenheart'?"

"I imagine her to be one of Mr. Stannard's early inamoratas. He had many, and, moreover, I should not be surprised to learn that he called more than one by that name. You know there was a small gift found in his desk addressed to some one of that name, which had never been sent. It has occurred to me that the Goldenheart of that matter, and the one to whom he wrote more recently, were not the same person."

"That may well be. You have a logical mind, Mrs. Faulkner. I say this to you, because I want your help. If I should tell you that I do not suspect Mrs. Stannard, or Miss Vernon, or Barry Stannard, would you then be willing to assist me in my investigation?"

Beatrice Faulkner looked at the detective an instant, and then said, in a low tone, "Mr. Courtenay?"

"Hush! Don't mention names. Let us close this conversation right here, and I will tell you at some other time what I want you to do for me."

Beatrice went away, and locking the door after her exit, Alan Ford remained alone in the studio for an hour or more.

Then he went for a walk which lasted another hour, and when he joined the family at luncheon, he was merely a courteous, friendly guest, with no suggestion of a detective.

In the afternoon, he requested permission to go over all of Eric Stannard's papers and correspondence and spent his time until dusk at this work.

At tea-time, he rejoined the others, and during the tea hour he talked of the visit of Orienta and her wonderful performance. Over and over it was discussed, and at each fresh detail or opinion Alan Ford grew more and more interested.

"Tell me of her costume," he said at last, when it seemed he had heard about every other bit of possible interest.

"It was beautiful!" exclaimed Natalie. "A long, full robe of a sort of sage green—"

"What material?" asked Ford, and Barry looked at him in surprise. What kind of a great detective was this who inquired concerning the texture of a costume?

"Why, it was silk, I think—yes, heavy silk—wasn't it, Joyce?"

"That, or a silk poplin. It was not a modern, modish gown at all; it was like a draped shawl."

"Drapery hanging from the shoulders?"

"Yes," Natalie answered, her mind so intent on giving Ford the right idea that she didn't think of the queerness of the question.

"Double skirt?"

"Yes—or, that is, a skirt, and then an overdrapery in full, long folds. Oh, it was lovely!"

"Are you apt with your pencil, Miss Vernon? Could you draw a rough sketch of that gown?"

"I can't but Mrs. Faulkner can. She's good at sketching draperies. Here's a paper-pad, Beatrice. Will you draw it for Mr. Ford?"

"Certainly," and taking the paper, Beatrice rapidly sketched an indication of Orienta, in her flowing robe.

"That's just right," said Natalie, "but the folds were fuller, I think."

"Never mind," said Ford, "this will do. I only wanted to get a mental picture of how she looked," and tearing up the picture he tossed it into a waste-basket.

The talk drifted to the house and its architecture.

"The whole house is a gem," said Alan Ford, enthusiastically, "but the staircase is a marvel. Nowhere in this country have I seen its equal. Your husband studied abroad, Mrs. Faulkner?"

"For years. He took great pride in building this house, as he intended it to be a masterpiece."

"Which it certainly is. Have you the plans of it? I should like to see them. Architecture is one of my hobbies."

"No, I haven't the plans, Mr. Ford."

"Oh, of course, they went to Mr. Stannard with the title deeds. Have you them, Mrs. Stannard?"

"No, we never had them. I never thought about them."

"Doubtless they are among Mr. Stannard's belongings. They must have been given to him. It doesn't matter. I oughtn't to take time to look at them, anyway. But one thing I do want to see, and that is the picture of Mrs. Faulkner that Mr. Stannard was engaged on at the time of his death. I'm told it is an example of his best work. May I have a glimpse of it?"

Beatrice Faulkner looked a little flattered at this request, but she said only, "Certainly, Mr. Ford. It is in the studio."

They all went in to see it, and Barry arranged the portrait on an easel and adjusted a light for it.

"It is indeed splendid," said Ford, in genuine admiration. The portrait was excellent and lifelike, but more than that it was a work of art. Beatrice, in a gown of deep ruby velvet, with the great staircase for a background, was at her very best. Her face, always handsome, was imbued with a fine spiritual grace, and she looked the embodiment of happiness. The whole conception was, perhaps, a little idealized, but it was a magnificent portrait, and a stunning picture.

"I'm so glad you have it, Beatrice," said Joyce softly. "You've been so good and dear, and have done so much for us all ever since Eric's death, I'm happy for you to have this remembrance of him."

"I'm glad, too," and Beatrice looked at the reflection of herself through misty eyes.

Bobsy Roberts came in while they were looking at the portrait, and he, too, was charmed with its beauty.

"That staircase makes a wonderful setting. I'm a fancier of staircases, and I think this one beats any I ever saw."

"A fancier of staircases, what do you mean?" asked Natalie.

"Yes, I've studied architecture, more or less, but the stairs have always especially interested me. I've just run across an old book, called 'Staircases and Steps,' and it's most interesting."

"I agree with you," said Alan Ford. "And the staircase here is a gem. That's why I wanted to see the plans of the house."

"Mayn't we see them?" asked Bobsy, turning to Joyce.

"Why, I haven't them, Mr. Roberts. Perhaps they're among my husband's belongings, but I've never seen them."

"You see," observed Ford, stepping out into the hall, "it's the wonderful proportion of one part to another that makes the beauty of it. The stairwell, clear to the roof, the arcaded hall, the noble high-ceiled studio and this little low-ceiled reception-room, fitted in just here, make up a splendid whole. Did not your late husband feel this?" Ford added, turning to Beatrice.

"Yes," she replied briefly, and then Bobsy tore himself away from the fascinating subject of architecture to ask Alan Ford if he had made any progress in his investigations.

"I have," replied Ford. "I have found out a lot of things that seem to me indicative. But it all hinges on whether there are spiritual influences at work or not. It seems to me, if the spirit of Mr. Stannard could return to earth and manifest itself in any way, it would prove—"

"Prove what?" asked Mrs. Faulkner, as the detective paused.

"Well, I may be foolish, but it would seem to me to prove that he wanted us to stop these investigations and let the matter remain a mystery."

"You really think that?" exclaimed Bobsy, as his estimation of Alan Ford's genius for detective work received a sudden setback.

"I think I agree with Mr. Ford," said Beatrice thoughtfully. "If Eric wanted us to continue our inquiries he would rest quiet in his grave."

"Oh, Mr. Ford," and Natalie gave a little gasp, "do you really think, then, it was Mr. Stannard's spirit that I heard in the studio? Do you think I am enough of a sensitive to bring about a real manifestation?"

"Those things are hard to tell, Miss Vernon. But I am going to ask the privilege of spending to-night alone in the studio. Then if any demonstration occurs, I shall, as I told you, think there is reason to believe—"

Ford's pause was eloquent of deep feeling. Truly the man was in earnest, whether he was right or not.

"May I not stay there with you?" asked Roberts, a little diffidently.

"No, please. I want to be alone. I shall lock myself in, and I must ask not to be disturbed in any way."

"I wish I could stay with you," and Natalie sighed. "But I suppose you wouldn't want me to."

"No, please," said Ford, gently. "I must be alone."

CHAPTER XX.

ON THE STAIRCASE.

AT Ford's request, the evening was spent without reference to the matter that was uppermost in every mind. At dinner the detective was merely a pleasant and entertaining guest. Afterward, in the drawing-room he proved himself a good talker and a good listener, and the conversation, on all sorts of topics, was casual and interesting.

It was nearly midnight when Ford bade them good night, and went to the studio to hold his vigil. The others followed him in, Joyce asking if he would like any refreshment served during the night.

"No," he replied. "It will not be so very long until daylight. And, too, perhaps nothing will happen, and I may fall asleep. Don't worry about me, Mrs. Stannard, I shall not be at all uncomfortable. See, I shall sit just where Miss Vernon sat the other night. Right here, facing the chair in which Mr. Stannard died. Thus, I have my back to the hall door, and the north window, but I shall make sure that all are securely locked, and then if any manifestation occurs, I shall be sure it is of supernatural origin."

"And that would make you give up the case?" asked Beatrice, incredulously.

"I think so," returned Ford. "I should probably leave here to-morrow."

"Well, of all queer detectives!" said Barry Stannard, as they went from the room and heard the click of the key as it was turned in the door behind them.

True to his word, Alan Ford examined with minutest care every door and window. He made sure no lock or catch was left unfastened, and then, the lights burning brightly, he took his seat just where he had said he would, facing the chair in which Eric Stannard had met his fate. Also, he faced the two doors that led respectively to the billiard-room and the terrace. This left more than half the room behind him and out of his line of vision. But the detective paid no attention to that part of the studio, and rested his contemplative gaze on the great armchair which had helped to stage the tragedy.

The hours went by. Alan Ford scarcely moved from the easy, relaxed position he had taken at first. He closed his eyes for the most of the time, now and then slowly opening them for a moment.

His left hand, lying on his knee, clasped some small object.

It was shortly after three o'clock in the morning, when there was a sound of a click and the lights went out.

The studio was in absolute darkness.

Ford arose quickly and crossed the room to the light switch by the hall door. He knew the position of the furniture, and felt his way by the chairs. As he did so, he heard a long, gasping sigh, and a faint cry of "Help!"

By this time he had reached the switch and turned it on. The sudden flash of light showed no one in the room save himself, but not pausing to look about, he unlocked the hall door, passed quickly through and ran up the first steps of the stairs.

On he went to the second great square landing, and there he paused. He did not stand still, but stepped about on the landing, making exclamations to himself, and breathing heavily. He leaned against the baluster, tapping on the newel post with his fingers. Then, he sat down on the lowest step of the third or upper division of the flight. He sat, tapping his foot

against the stair, he even whistled a little under his breath. He seemed anxious not to be silent.

There was a low light in all the halls and occasionally Ford leaned his head over the baluster and commanded a view of the hall below.

Half an hour passed, and then Joyce Stannard appeared from the hall above. She wore a boudoir gown and slippers, and her weary eyes betokened a sleepless night.

She started with surprise at sight of Alan Ford on the stairs. But he made a motion requesting her to be silent, and taking a bit of paper from his pocket he wrote:

"Say no word. Go back to the hall above and remain there, but out of sight of this spot, until I summon you. Overhear all you can, but on no account let yourself be seen."

Joyce read the strange message, and going back up the few steps she had descended, she sat on a hall window seat, concealed by a light curtain.

Then Alan Ford, with a short, sad sigh, stood up and approached the paneled wall of the staircase. Down the flights the panels of course made an acute angle but on the landing they were right angled.

Placing his lips to the wall itself, Ford said in a clear, low whisper, "Will you come out?"

From behind the wall he heard an agonized moan.

"It would be better," he said, gently. "Do come."

Another moment passed, and then, a panel of the wainscot slid open and Beatrice Faulkner stepped forth onto the landing.

"You know all?" she said, and her great despairing eyes looked into those of the detective.

"Almost all," he returned, and his glance at her was infinitely sad. "You killed Stannard?"

"Yes," she said, and swayed as if she would fall to the floor.

Ford assisted her to stand and then gently aided her to a seat on the stair where he had sat a moment since.

Beatrice sank to the step and Ford closed the panel she had left open. He did not look into the place to which the panel gave entrance, for he knew what it was. It was the space above the reception-room. He had seen when he entered the house that since the reception-room and the studio were next each other and yet there was five or six feet difference in the height of their respective ceilings, that space must be a sort of loft or waste room. It showed from none of the sides. Both hall and studio were high ceiled. The staircase well reached to the roof. There was no explanation of the discrepancy but a waste space the size of the reception-room and about six feet in height.

This space, of course, abutted on the studio, the hall, the stairs, and on the other side, the outer or terrace wall.

In the studio the balcony ran along the wall at about the height of the stair landing on the other side. Ford guessed at once that ingress to that waste space must be had from the studio or the stair landing or both. He now was sure that panels from both opened into it.

As he closed the panel, he noted that there was no secret or concealed fastening. Merely an ordinary flush spring catch, inconspicuous but not hidden.

Ford turned to the woman on the stairs. He sat down beside her. "Tell me about it," he said, and his voice was so gentle, his face so sad, that Beatrice turned to him as to a friend.

"There is little to tell," she said, wearily. "It is the story of a great love, a love too big and strong to be conquered by a weak-willed woman. I tried—oh, I tried—"

"Don't give way, Mrs. Faulkner, just tell me the main facts. You knew Mr. Stannard years ago?"

"I was his first love. We were schoolmates. I always loved him—more than loved him. I worshiped, adored him. He loved me—but he was always fickle. He loved every woman he saw. Then—he married—his first wife, I mean, and I thought I should die. But never mind the past. I married, and I tried to forget Eric. My husband built this beautiful home, but he had financial troubles and couldn't keep it. Eric Stannard bought it, and mean-

while his wife had died, and he married my friend Joyce. I tried to be reconciled, but the demon of jealousy tore my very heart out. I gave over this house to them and went away. A portrait of myself was to be part of the purchase price, and—even though I knew it would be acute torment to see Eric happy here with Joyce, I came to stay a month and have the picture painted. As I feared, the necessarily intimate association between the artist and myself quickened my never-dying love for him, until I was almost frantic. I could have stood it, though, had it been only his wife. But when he fell desperately in love with the model, I resented it for Joyce and myself both. But I had no thought of killing him—don't think that!"

"It was done on a sudden impulse, then?" Ford was watching her closely. He knew that her enforced calm might give way at any instant and he strove to speak quietly and lead her gently on to a confession. Moreover, he trusted that Joyce was listening, as he had asked her to do. Thus the confession would be witnessed.

"It was this way," and Beatrice looked piteously into his kind eyes. "Mr. Wadsworth asked me that night to marry him. We were in the drawing room, as you know. I wouldn't say yes, for I still had a faint hope of winning Eric. It was absurd for me to think it, but I was desperate. After Mr. Wadsworth left me, I sat a moment in the drawing-room, and then I resolved to go to Eric, by the secret passage, of which only he and I knew, and beg him to put Joyce away and take me. I say this without shame, for I was—and am, still—so madly in love with him, that I had no shame regarding it, and would have suffered any ignominy or humiliation to win him. I went through that small space; it is not really secret, but no one has ever noticed it, and I went through it to the studio, and stepping in the room, on the little balcony, I saw Eric below me, gazing at the etching of Natalie with an adoring look. He bent down and kissed the picture, and then I descended the stairs and spoke to him. I told him that Natalie loved Barry and hated him. I urged him to divorce Joyce and let her marry Eugene Courtenay and I begged him to marry me. He laughed at me! I shall never forget that laugh! But that wasn't why I killed him. It was because he turned again to that picture of Natalie and into his face came a look that I had never seen there. A look of love such as I had never been able to call forth, a worshiping passion that transcended all love I had ever dreamed of. And that he felt for a little girl who hated him! Jealousy maddened me, and snatching up an etching tool I marred the wax beyond recognition. He turned on me, his face livid with rage. The contrast—the look of love he had for the girl, the look of venomous hate he gave me, bereft me of my senses. No, I do not mean I did not know what I was doing—I did know. I fully meant at that moment to kill him, and then to kill myself, that we might at least die together. I should not have thought of killing him if I hadn't chanced to have that tool in my hand. Nor should I have wanted to kill him but for his scorn of me and his love for her. The two together drove me wild, and I stabbed him in a moment of fierce passion that was love, not hate. Then, as I was about to draw forth the needle and stab myself, I saw that he was not dead. He looked at me, and I couldn't say it was with hatred. I think—I honestly think—that he gloried in my deed—you cannot understand — it is a strange idea, but I think he realized at last the depth of my love, and appreciated it. Anyway, I read that in his face, and I couldn't bring myself to leave a world that still held him. I didn't dare remove the needle lest it bring about his death; I didn't dare remain and be found there with him. My mind fairly flew. I thought so fast and so clearly, I concluded to escape by the panel and return quickly through the hall, and thus coming upon him, apparently innocently, save his life."

"You crossed the room," Ford prompted, for the speaker's strength was failing.

"Yes, I crossed the room as deliberately as if nothing had happened. I turned off the light that I might make good my escape. I flew through the paneled space, and in a few seconds I was out at this end,

here on this landing and down the stairs. I saw at once that Blake had heard something, but whether it was a sound from Eric, or the noise of my departure, I did not then know. I spoke to the man—and the rest you know."

"You were surprised when the light was turned on to see the two women there?"

"I was dumfounded. I couldn't think at first what it would mean to me—or to them. I had no thought of allowing them to be suspected of the crime, but circumstances were too strong for me. They were found there, near the dying man—I had, to all appearances, come in from the other end of the room—naturally they were suspected. And then reaction had come; no longer was I keyed up by that torment of jealousy, that spur of scorned love. I had time to think—even when all were wondering and questioning, I had time to think. And I concluded I would never confess unless I was obliged to do so to save some one else. I decided to devote every energy and use every effort to divert suspicion from all in the household. It was I who really arranged for—"

"For the clairvoyant," said Ford as Beatrice paused from sheer weakness.

"Yes, you understand that?"

"You hired her, instructed her to write to Mrs. Stannard, and you told her what to say."

"Yes; I wanted her to make it appear that the murderer was a man who had entered through the billiard-room. I meant the man's identity to be absolutely unknown. But they managed to fasten it on Mr. Courtenay, and my plan failed utterly."

"And then?"

"Then I had about decided to tell the truth. When they arrested Barry, I quite decided. And then you came. I knew that was my death-knell. But when you said if the spirit manifestation appeared in the studio to-night — that was a trap, wasn't it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Faulkner, it was a trap. I knew whoever had been playing 'spirit' by the use of the paneled space would do it again to-night at my words, and I felt sure it would be you. I am sorry—"

"I believe you are, Mr. Ford. I know from your whole attitude you are sorry for me. Otherwise I could not have told you all this as I have done. You are more like a father confessor than a detective. It helps a little to know you are sorry for me—"

"How did Orienta read the papers? The pocket-light method?"

"Yes. She is very clever; I've known her for years. She is not a medium at all. I persuaded her that to do as I asked would save innocent people from being suspected. Of course, she didn't know I was guilty."

"And you were 'Goldenheart'?"

"Yes. It was Eric's old pet name for me. He wrote that letter to me, giving me the emeralds if I would cease asking for his love. He said I knew where the jewels were, because he always kept them in the paneled space—that's what we called it—and Joyce did overhear him saying to me in the studio practically what he had written in the letter. Had she not been so wrapped up in her own trouble, she would have heard it clearly. Of course, too, that little golden heart that was bought and never presented was meant for me."

"You told Orienta to say that Mr. Stannard said 'Neither Natalie *nor* Joyce'?"

"Yes, for I really think that was what he did mean to say. He wouldn't implicate me, even with his dying breath, but he tried to clear them. He was a wonderful man, Mr. Ford. Not a good man, perhaps, but a brave one. He would have defended any or all of us, but he had no chance. My love for him has been the mainspring of my whole life. Instead of forgetting him, I grew more madly in love with him year by year. I had no business to come here and let him paint me. Those hours when I posed for him were the happiest I have ever known. That's why the portrait is of a happy woman I hoped against hope that I could yet win him back. But I couldn't—I can only follow him."

The quietness of Beatrice's voice had lulled any suspicions Ford might have had of her intent, and when she drew from the folds of her bodice an etching needle exactly like the one that had killed Eric and

drove it into her own breast, Ford wheeled suddenly and grasped her hand—but too late. The deed was done.

At his exclamation Joyce ran down from the hall above, where she had been listening to Beatrice's story. She sank down beside the wounded woman and took the drooping figure in her arms.

"Forgive—" moaned Beatrice. "Joyce—forgive—I—loved him so."

"Yes — yes," soothed Joyce, scarce knowing what she said. "What can we do, Mr. Ford? Oh, what can we do?"

"Nothing, I fear. Call help. Shall I ring?" Ford hastened to the nearest bell and rang it. Immediately people began to gather—servants, family—and all sorts of contradictory orders were given. But with his finger on the pulse of the dying woman, the detective tried to learn yet more facts. "The will," he asked, "who changed it?"

"Eric himself," Beatrice answered. "That's why— Oh, Eric!" Her face beamed with a strange radiance, and then, sinking back in Joyce's arms, Beatrice Faulkner breathed her last.

The next day Alan Ford declared he must hasten away.

"But tell us more of your work," implored Bobsy Roberts; "give us a few moments more."

"And tell us about that clairvoyant woman," said Barry. "How did she read those papers in the dark?"

"I realized, before I came up here at all," said Ford, "that there had to be some secret means of entrance to the studio. I see now it was never meant to be secret. The architect made the reception-room ceiling lower than the studio ceiling because it was a smaller room, and he observed due proportions. This left a space there, but it was not concealed or hidden. The catches on both doors are merely small ones and inconspicuous, but not concealed. Mr. Faulkner left all the house plans in that loft, and Eric Stannard knew of it. He chose to conceal his jewels there as being a convenient place. Only he and Mrs. Faulkner knew of the space, but that was merely a chance happening. He in no sense kept it a secret. When I read the accounts in New York papers, I felt the case must hinge on another entrance of some sort. When I reached here I saw at once that there was a discrepancy in the heights of those two ceilings, and I worked from that. I was sure the spirit manifestations were made possible by human means working through that concealed space, and I found I was right. I assumed it was probably Mrs. Faulkner who played the spirit, as she refused to show the plans of the house; and my theories, based on those plans, left her free to do all she did do without being discovered. I found she could have placed the jewels on the table that night and returned to her room through the little loft, and be seated at her desk, writing, when Mrs. Stannard reached her room. She said she heard Mrs. Stannard coming up-stairs; but as the door was shut and the stairs thickly carpeted, this was unlikely. So I assumed she was expecting her. All facts pointed to the guilt of Mrs. Faulkner, but they were by no means obvious. So when I said if spirits came to the studio last night I should drop the case to-day, I meant because it would be solved. But Mrs. Faulkner thought I would give it up as unsolvable, so she played spirit again. I had in my hand a tiny mirror of the sort that shows what is passing at one's back. I heard, as I sat there, the soft opening of the panel in the studio balcony, and I knew she was coming down the little stair. I heard her click off the light; and just as she did so, I caught a glimpse of her in my mirror. So I went out at the hall door, snapping on the light as I passed, and went up on the grand staircase, knowing I would head her off, and have her practically penned in there. Mrs. Stannard found me waiting there, and I arranged for her to witness the confession that I knew must come. I did not foresee that Mrs. Faulkner would take her own life, but perhaps it is as well. There was no happiness or peace for her in this world; it was better she should expiate her own sin. Poor soul, she was a victim of a love that proved too great for her human nature to strive against. As to the will, I felt sure Mr. Stannard had made that change himself. It looked like his writing, and I felt sure neither Miss Ver-

non nor Mr. Barry Stannard would have done it."

"And you picked out the truth from the maze of probabilities and suspicion and false evidence—" Bobsy looked at the great detective in an awed way.

"I gained most of my information and formed most of my conclusions from my talks with each one separately. I am a fairly good judge of character, and I saw at once neither Mrs. Stannard nor Miss Vernon was guilty. They were both uncertain and indefinite in their testimony. They scarcely knew even the sequence of events at the time of the tragedy; if they had been telling untruths, they would have been positive in their statements. Also, I saw at once Barry Stannard and Miss Vernon more than half feared each other guilty, and each was ready for any sacrifice or effort to save the other. This let them both out, for neither could be guilty and suspect some one else! Mr. Courtenay had practically no real evidence against him, so it came back to Mrs. Faulkner. I talked to her enough to strengthen my suspicion in that direction, and then tested her by the night in the studio. She proved herself the source of the 'spiritual' manifestations, and showed how she did it. That left only the matter of getting her confession. I feel deep pity for the poor woman; she led a sad, miserable existence because of a mistaken love. Also, I must admit that she was of a different stamp from the people here. Mrs. Faulkner was capable of strong passion that did not stop at crime. I judge the rest of you would not be, and I do not think I am mistaken in that."

Alan Ford looked around at the pure, sweet face of Natalie, the noble countenance of Joyce, and the brave, boyish frankness that shone in Barry's glance and sighed as he thought of the smoldering fires in the deep eyes of the woman who was conquered by her own evil passion.

"But tell us about the sealed reading," insisted Bobsy as Ford rose to go.

"Oh, yes!" cried Natalie. "How was that done?"

"One of the tricks of the trade," said Ford. "You know there are dozens of ways to read sealed writings."

"Yes; but what way did she use?"

"This way. You know, I insisted on a full description of her dress. When I found it was of full pattern and made of an opaque material, I understood. You see, if a message is written with ink, and if the paper is slipped, unfolded, into a moderately thin envelope, the writing can be read with ease in the dark by holding an electric pocket flashlight behind the envelope. Orienta, the room being darkened, drew the loose folds of her gown over her head, and thus shielded, took a little flashlight from her pocket, read them all by its aid; then, returning the light to her pocket, remembered the questions and spoke them out, both with and without a light. The second time, I believe, she read the first ones in the dark and the others in the light. There were no signatures, but she had learned each one's handwriting from the first lot. The thing is simple, and is the most mystifying of all sealed paper readings."

"Will it always work?" asked Roberts, greatly interested.

"In total darkness, yes. Go into a dark closet and try it. Of course, Orienta's drapery served to aid her, and also to conceal the light from her audience."

"And all the answers she made up—or Beatrice had told her," said Natalie thoughtfully.

"Yes," said Ford. "And now I must go. I shall hope to meet you all again some day; and if I can tell you anything more you care to learn about these make-believe wizards, I shall be glad to do so."

He went away, and Barry and Natalie went off by themselves, to rejoice in the fact that all veils of suspicion were lifted from them, and that they had long years ahead to help one another to forget the past and make a radiant, happy future.

Joyce had a quiet knowledge that some time in the coming years she, too, would again know happiness, and all united in a sad pity for the beautiful but misguided woman whose hand wrought the tragedy of Faulkner's Folly.

(The end.)

Two Aces

by Henry Leverage

DANTON was an "Ace" in the British Royal Flying Corps. An Ace, as all men know, is a flyer who has succeeded in "sitting on the tail" of five Fokkers, or more. He may have brought down lesser fry than Fokkers—Aviatiks or Taubes—but these had never been considered fair game by the B. R. F. C.

Danton had an idea that the war would be won in the air. This was another way of saying that artillery would finish the job, and that artillery was blind without the eyes of the army poised anywhere from ten thousand feet to extreme elevation above the enemy's territory.

The game of spotting shots or photographing or protecting the heavier tractor-planes was one that called for all the skill and daring of super-birdmen. Danton was of this type. He had been rejected twice in the examinations, due to his light weight and youth. This, however, he had overcome by sheer perseverence and coolness when under fire at the Flanders front. The ambulance he drove bore the charmed life of its driver. It had been riddled and overturned. It had ventured to the front trenches, and, in the end, when they asked Danton what he wanted in the way of promotion, he had pointed up into the air where a Sopwith's "pup" hovered, and said:

"That's the highest little order in the world."

Danton earned his place upon the staff of the Royal Flying Corps after a winter of hard work. The birdmen of the corps are required to do a number of "stunts" that would daunt an American trick flyer before they may qualify for the pup or dragon-fly type of planes. These two types can climb two thousand feet a minute, which is twenty miles an hour, straight toward the zenith. They can also speed a full hundred and fifty miles an hour when the engine is running sweetly, which makes them the fastest carriers that man has built.

Danton's pup answered to his hand like a surf-board in the currents of Hawaii's ocean. Its wings were little more than seven yards from tip to tip. He had learned all the tricks, such as diving straight downward upon the pup's nose, or looping the loop like a tumbler-pigeon dizzy with delight. He became known to the Germans as a flier to fear and to stay away from.

Twice Boelke, the great German Ace, had dropped from a silver cloud down toward Danton, and each time Danton had riddled the wings of the German's machine. When Boelke was killed, upon another front, Danton roamed the air for a foeman worthy of his wings. It was during this time that he won his Ace by bringing down five of the German planes. A sixth came out for him, and in the battle that took place Danton jammed his Lewis gun just as he looped the loop, and was sitting upon the tail for a finishing salvo.

Men rose from the trenches to watch the

fight between Danton and the German Ace in a Fokker. Danton, with bullets spitting from his automatic revolver, drove the Fokker to the earth, where it crashed and took fire.

A company of Australians came running up in time to drag the German from the wreckage of his machine. He faced Danton, who had alighted from the pup. The German thrust out his hand impulsively. The two enemies clasped in respect, then both reeled, staggered, and fell across the green.

Danton had been shot through his right lung and arm. The German had not been hit. His body, however, was singed and scorched. His leathern clothes clung to his skin. He had inhaled the fire and smoke of his machine.

Both birdmen were taken to the same hospital. There was an American surgeon there who had a wonderful way with a pierced lung or a flamed tissue. The two were placed in a separate ward consisting of twin beds. Then the surgeon operated upon the German first. Danton had requested it. It was according to his division. It was the one glow in all the strife.

Danton recovered slowly. He learned that the German had been removed to a detention camp, and then to England. The American doctor and the nurses had told him that the birdman's name was Karl. He had refused to write to Germany when permitted. He had never given his name. He had sulked before going away, like some big child, and had cursed Danton for bringing him down.

Danton forgot him—all save the blue of his eyes and the cleft in his chin. "A poor loser," was the birdman's comment, as he dismissed the thought and turned toward the roses some one had placed at the head of his bed.

A week later he crossed the Channel, with a month's furlough, and the pain in his lung all but gone under the skilful touch of the American surgeon. The month lengthened into three before he started to chafe for the open sky and the swirl of a racing propeller. He wanted the old game that had been driven into his blood like a heritage of the great unrest.

It was at this time he first heard of the new German aspirant to the honors of Immelman and Boelke. This "killer" had come, like a knight of old, out of Flanders, to throw his glove into the lists, and had downed the best Ace of the French Corps, had been a thorn in the side of the American Escadrille; then, as by some instinct, had picked out as fair game the same flying-ground where the unknown Karl had been conquered by Danton.

Over this the killer would fly, at eighteen thousand feet, and "nose-dive" even the Avion du Chasse of the French or the new British Bristol, in a manner that spoke of a kingfisher darting for trout in a limpid stream.

Danton heard tall talk of this new German machine, which was as yet unclassified and uncaptured. It was the last word of Mercedes factory; it was said to be all of two hundred horse-power; and it was handled by one man, or devil, according to the stories of those who had met the killer.

When the killer was credited with three British planes in one day—and two of these within a minute of fighting—the matter became serious enough to warrant all attention. The papers called down their anathemas, and urged the Flying Corps to greater effort. The unknown became the talk of the front from the Alps to the sea.

The higher Aces lurked in silver clouds for one swoop at the newcomer, who was fast equaling Immelman's record of thirty planes. They glimpsed the killer at times, but those who closed regretted it, for they were either lured over a pit of guns or driven down out of control behind the German lines.

Danton worried over the news like a lion-hunter at the report of friends being dragged into the jungle. He reported five times for the corps. He wrote articles for the *Times*, then desperately bribed a royal surgeon with all kinds of promises and lies for a clear bill of health and a certificate that his lungs were like two leathern bellows, and his nerve as chilled as Sheffield steel. He got the billet—a last-word pup.

He crossed the Channel as a pigeon goes home to his own. Other planes were crossing, but he outdistanced them all. He cir-

cled over the old ground, looped the loop, shelved down a thousand feet, then skimmed the stately French elms, and landed upon the mark, and found his friends and his mechanics awaiting his coming with outstretched arms.

They had recognized him when even a speck in the air by the skill of his descent and the manner of handling the sensitive pup.

"The Eyes of the Army" had need for a thousand Dantons. The orders were out from headquarters to keep all German machines back of a twenty-mile line. A great offensive was all but launched. The drumfire and the roll of artillery echoed and reechoed athwart a red-blazed sky. Tracks were everywhere upon which great guns were being hurried up to the first trenches. Bristols, Martinsydes, pups and R. F. C. battle-planes held the air, and swooped and maneuvered down below the far-flung line.

"We'll hold you," they told Danton, "for another day. The air is ours now. It may not be to-morrow. Besides, we want you to meet an old friend of ours—the Avenger. He's got seventeen to his credit. That pup you drove over ought to close up his record. It's a beastly shame the stuff we've had to get along with, and how late they are learning."

Danton waited. The Avenger was a new name given to the killer, of whom all England had been denouncing. Days passed without any definite word of this airman. Danton took the air to try out his engine, but was ordered to stay well back of the British trenches. He chafed over this order, and sulked—a speck in the sky, with the nose of his machine ever turning toward the Rhine, like a hound in scent of fair game. He came down in a spiral nose-dive, satisfied that his pup was tuned to perfection. He walked across the park, after turning the plane over to the mechanics, and went into the lieutenant's headquarters to report.

Planes were arriving one by one out of the gloom. They had been over the set route, and were bringing in their observations. Danton waited for the full count. He wanted to see if any were missing. An hour passed, and then two. Five planes had not reported. Word came in then that one of the five was down and safely landed in the Verdun region.

"That leaves four," said the lieutenant to Danton; "four to the credit of the Germans—Burke, Southgate, O'Hara, and—who's the other?"

"Little Connell—the Ace!"

The lieutenant grew thoughtful. He tugged at his mustache. "We'll get the reason to-morrow," he mused, "but Ill bet a 'pony' the Avenger is up again—looks like his work. Connell flies high, and has seven to his credit that we know of. He wouldn't go down without a fight, or a better man against him. We've got to get that fellow. We'll bait him. I'll send Daggert and Delaney out with a tractor, and you can take the air at five thousand meters, or better. Take Connell's route. You'll find a copy of his orders in the *château*. Tell Daggert and Delaney to be ready at sunrise. I want that German Ace added to your scalps, Danton. I don't know anybody else who can do it. Do you?"

Danton flushed. He lighted a cigarette to hide his confusion. "I'll try," he said tersely. "The pup is barking nicely sir, and it ought to turn the trick if we lure that fellow out, or up. I know his style—it's the same as that Karl's I winged when I got scratched."

"Karl's?" It was the lieutenant's turn to tighten his lips. "This killer must be his pupil. I can tell Karl's fledglings as high as they can fly. They all came over the line in one way—high, with cloud cover somewhere below them. They didn't go up when we got the shrapnel bursting nicely. Only fools do that now. They dropped for this cloud, and were out of range before we could think. Karl taught us that 'flip' (trick), but it was Boelke's in the beginning."

Danton saluted, and walked through the gloom toward the *château*. He turned, now and then, and listened. He went on each time with high resolve in his heart. Little Connell had been his best friend in the old days when they were all learning. Now Connell was missing, and the odds were, as the lieutenant had said, that the Avenger had winged him while far back of the Ger-

man lines. The official reports of the enemy would give the details, but these were generally late in coming.

Danton found the orders of the day and the route set for Connell. He had not deviated far from this, Danton concluded. It was in the Somme sector, and full of pitfalls and lurking Fokkers. A Fokker, however, had not winged Little Connell, for the plane he drove had a full ten miles upon the Fokkers. It was the new "made in Germany" machine that had brought down the British flyer. No other kind could outclimb or outspeed the B. R. F. C. standard.

The game, Danton knew, had resolved itself in design and the survival of the fleetest. All things being equal, the bird-man with ten miles per hour over his quarry was superior to a hundred of the slower machines. Danton had good cause to remember the coming of the Fokkers, and the havoc they had wrought among the slower British machines in the early days of the struggle for the air.

They had pounced like hawks down upon, around, and under their prey. They had cleared the way for the Germans, all in one afternoon. They had given the French a hard battle for supremacy. They had cost untold lives in the ranks of the Allies, and when they were met and conquered, it was through the mechanical skill of the home factories, and not the cunning of birdmen.

"Give us complete control of the sky," Danton's chief had stated more than once, "and we have an open road to Berlin." This was the cry of the entire army. No one of all that splendid expedition had not learned to rely upon the planes as upon their own eyes.

It was as if another dimension had been brought into play upon the stage of modern warfare. History had been written by armies fighting upon a flat surface. Now all was changed. The third dimension had been called to the aid of both sides. The field had widened over night. The end was not yet, but the supreme holder of the third dimension was the answer to the deadlock.

The pup plane that Danton drove was England's last word. Others, and faster, were building, or were projected.

Danton took the air by a narrow margin over the elms the following morning. The pup was tuned to the last revolution, but even at that there was great danger in rising and in landing. No flying-field seemed big enough to get the necessary run. He mounted in a straight, high-angled flight. He soared over the heavier tractor containing Daggert and Delaney, and went up and up, and out over the German trenches and the shell-dug roads of devastated France.

He saw here and there German planes rising to meet him, like bubbles coming up through placid water. He laughed them away. They were a mile below him, and ten minutes too late for the tractor. He caught then, as he sighted the silver-ribboned Somme, the fluffy bursts of searching shrapnel. It, too, was far down, and mushroomed vainly.

Danton had but three hours of gasoline, all that the pup could carry. His Lewis gun was fixed, and cam-timed with the whirling blades of the propeller before him, so that he could fire directly ahead, or down or up, by maneuvering the entire plane.

Danton had secured his Ace by nose-diving, or dropping at the rate of two hundred miles a minute upon his prey. He had learned to spiral this descent, as a corkscrew sinks into a cork, and to hedge about the doomed quarry a hail of steel through which it could not escape. He could also loop the loop when pursued by a Fokker, and bring up upon that plane's tail before the German knew what had happened.

This maneuver called for certain conditions which were not always to be had. It was nerve-racking and dangerous, and Danton preferred the nose-dive for its simplicity and effectiveness.

The tractor containing the two veteran airmen had risen to avoid shrapnel. It had also brought out the best of the German planes in pursuit. These were trying to gain its level. Danton watched them, then peered ahead for some sign of a single plane that would prove formidable. This plane, he reasoned would be the Avenger, and of the new supertype of which they had no inkling.

Danton searched out the haze and the safety of the clouds as he followed the tractor. He was flying high enough to be in perfect safety. He had, he knew, the fastest bird in the air that morning. He wanted one glimpse of the Avenger. He wanted to be above it when it attacked the tractor. The rest would be his famous nose-dive, from which no lower plane should escape.

True, the other might have a trick or two up his sleeve. The other might "flip" in time, and bring up sitting on the pup's tail. One had done this to Connell, perhaps. It was a maneuver the little British flyer had always feared.

Danton's plane burst through the last of a clammy haze, to emerge out into the white sunlight. He blinked his eyes, then peered ahead over the sights of the Lewis gun, and through the blades of the swishing propeller. He saw a silver flake high in the sky. It was rising in a vast spiral, like a birch-leaf caught in a lifting eddy of wind. It was a battle-plane—a one-man killer, and it was of a new construction that Danton had never seen before.

"The Avenger!" he exclaimed. "It's that, or one like that."

He climbed to a higher cloud. He clove through fluff and vapor. Each bank struck against his covered face as a cold, clammy hand. His speed, as he rose, was as some mote rising toward the sun.

The Avenger had not noticed him. It was intent upon rising above the fast-flying tractor. Daggert and Delaney had sensed its purpose and were striving to hold their own.

The pup reached eighteen thousand feet before Danton was satisfied that he held the altitude-gage over the German. Clouds had favored him in gaining this position. He had no fear. The tractor, however, was in great danger. The fast-rising German knew this type, and could attack it in its most vulnerable spot. That would be from above or directly below.

Broadside on, or directly ahead or astern, was the tractor's favorite fighting position. It carried a heavier gun than the Lewis. It could spray grapeshot or light shrapnel from all sides.

The Avenger poised with banked wings as the upper position was obtained. Daggert and Delaney were plainly nervous. Danton knew this by the manner of their flying. They had swerved from a straight course, and had lost speed by so doing. They had not followed Danton's orders in keeping the attacking plane fully extended.

The movement was all but fatal. The Avenger, for such Danton now knew it to be, had ceased climbing, and was beginning to drop.

It was then that Danton tilted his pup for a long glide that pointed below the tractor. He reasoned that the German machine would be in a certain spot at the moment he reached the same position.

He saw, then, that the Avenger had recognized the menace that had glided from out of the clouds. The tractor drove on, like a sluggish crane, while the Avenger and Danton's pup converged toward each other, with Danton holding the better position.

They had three miles of limpid air to fall in, and they were both falling in the long nose-glide, as divers cleaving for one object at the bottom of the sea.

The German flier glanced upward with cool calculation. The two descending planes were plumbing the converging lines of an acute angle whose base was the sky and whose apex was the earth. Danton had leaned forward and placed a drum of fifty shells upon his Lewis gun. Other drums, with their ammunition in two layers, like strawberries in a cake, were ready for instant use.

Danton's lips closed. The Berserker rage at the carelessness of the tractor-plane had given place to a steely coolness. He felt the cut of the wind as it struck over the edge of his forward guard. He was dropping all of two hundred miles a minute. It was but a second after he placed the drum upon the rapid-firer, that he heard, above the roar of his exhaust, the answering exhaust of the other plane. He was over it then, and both were falling toward the earth.

He sighted along the air cooled barrel of the Lewis, and touched the trigger. Gas from the discharge struck back at his exposed forehead. His goggles fogged. He

held the trigger back, and thought coolly, deliberately, as he pressed the dive home. It was his old-time *coup*, and there seemed no chance for the German plane.

The German, however, had realized the danger. It would never do to stay within the cone of Danton's flying hedge of steel. There was one thing to do, in a case of this kind. That was to bank sharply and allow the following machine to pass. It was another way of setting upon its tail. The maneuver called for all the skill of the German pilot, and all the strength that was in the plane.

It succeeded. Danton, intent upon getting within close range, saw himself striking across and down through the void. He turned his head slightly. A face peered over the " marcelle " of the German plane. Its pilot was smiling.

Danton almost lost his grip upon himself. He brought the pup to a gliding climb that strained every stay of his machine. He mounted then, as the German winged toward the earth. The tractor appeared from the north. They went back to the British lines together. When they had landed, Danton stepped from his cramped position, lighted a cigarette, and hurried over to the *château*.

" Is the lieutenant here?" he asked with white, drawn face.

The lieutenant of the escadrelle heard his voice. " Come up," he called from an upper room.

Danton mounted the stairway. He was almost dizzy. He groped along the dark hallway, then pressed a door open. Three men were inside, consulting a scale map of northern France. The lieutenant glanced at Danton, then saw that something had happened, and came across the room.

" What is it, Danton?"

Danton clicked his heels and saluted, as he sparred for words. " I," he said, " missed the Avenger. I tried. I had him. I—"

" What!"

Danton passed his thin, well-shaped hand across his eyes and brows. " I had him, lieutenant, where I wanted him. We were beyond the anti-aircraft guns — ten miles within the lines. I could have got him, for the pup had miles over him. I could have—"

" Well? What's the matter, Danton? Why didn't you get him? He's done us enough damage, you ought to know that!"

" I don't fight fate!" blurted Danton.

" Where was the—the fate, boy?"

" In the new Mercedes, or whatever kind of plane that was. It's fast, but not so fast as the pup! Karl was in it."

The lieutenant's face clouded.

Danton closed his eyes in strained thought. The thing was beyond belief, but he had seen it himself. He sought for words to explain exactly what had happened. He remembered that the familiar face that had peered from the cock-pit of the German machine, had smiled upon him. He had seen that same smile when he had brought Karl to earth, and Karl had first shaken hands, and then had remembered to let respect turn to hate in the manner of his race, when captured by the British.

Danton turned and said:

" It was Karl—the German I drove down once before. The bird-man who wouldn't give his name or station. It was Karl, I tell you! I never forget a face. I glimpsed him as I shot down alongside the Mercedes. He has escaped from the detention camp. Good God, lieutenant, why do they let those things happen? He's taken a tremendous toll of our men. He's still living. He—"

Danton's voice choked.

" Nonsense, boy!" declared the aged commander. " It couldn't be. You're unstrung. You've been up too high. The old trouble with your lung is coming back. Take a week off—go to England."

Danton dropped his face in two hot palms. He saw there the sweeping face of the German. He opened his eyes, and glanced up at the lieutenant. " Will you wire?" he asked guardedly.

" To the camp?"

" Yes."

" It's useless, but to suit you I'll do it. Now take things coolly, boy. You're unstrung, that's all."

The next morning Danton took the air. The pup had been groomed like a *Grand*

Prix winner. It answered to the controls in a manner that delighted the heart of the bird-man. He had the lieutenant's permission to free-lance the entire German front. He had an abiding desire to grapple once more with the Mercedes and its pilot. This time, he concluded, it would not get away so easily. He was its master. It was but a question of finding the German in the air and away from the lesser "Archibalds," as Danton called the anti-aircraft guns.

He followed the silver stream of the Somme. His altitude was all of twelve thousand feet, with the pup in reserve. The network of the German lines had been passed in safety. No plane had come up to meet him. Keen eyes, however, had undoubtedly been upon him from the first. The word had been passed along the entire line that something new in Bristols was scouting for Fokkers.

Danton raised his head-gear and goggles. He breathed the cutting air as if it were flavored by the wine-land below him. He edged toward the Verdun sector and Belfort. His intention was to land at that fortress, and return along the line in the afternoon, or the following day.

Clouds had formed overhead like fluffy balls of shrapnel. They were higher than the pup. Danton watched them, fearing a surprise. He raised his elevating plane, and climbed.

It was in time. A speck burst from a center ball of vapor. It came with the glide of a swallow—the darting lunge of a javelin. It was the plane of the Avenger.

Danton stiffened as he realized the ambush he had fallen into. He had not mounted high enough to escape its downward thrust. He was trapped in much the same way he had often trapped other planes.

He felt a stay snap as the Avenger got the range. The center of the whirling wheel before the Mercedes seemed to be spitting crimson hate. Danton could not meet this fire. His position was desperate. He thought rapidly as he tilted the nose of the pup. He could not drop in time to escape. He could not loop. He shelved down the air, in the manner of a paper floating upon its edge. It took all of his skill to hold this position, and fall with dizzy side lurches.

The maneuver was partly successful. The Mercedes tried to bank and hold its spitting fire upon the pup at the same time. It failed, after riddling Danton's upper plane and chipping his propeller. The two planes ranged alongside, neither able to use its fixed machine gun.

Danton breathed freely. The game was his now. He had the speed, and the other was at his mercy. Reaching, he placed a drum upon the Lewis gun. Both planes were doing the best. The pup gained a slightly higher level. Fifty yards more and Danton knew he could loop and bring up behind the other, and give it the raking fire from which no plane could escape.

He turned his rudder. The German had sought to edge away. He followed, higher in the air, but not too far away to strike. They were flying over the deadlock of criss-crossed trenches that marked No Man's Land. The armies were watching them. Both planes were marked — one with the circle, the other with the cross.

The Avenger's plane attempted to edge downward and toward the German lines. Danton drove it back. He came close in this maneuver — so close that the German turned and stared at him from over the rim of the cock-pit. The smile was gone from the Avenger's face. Death was very close, indeed.

Danton watched, with superior sense of control. He studied the white features across the air. He sighted his automatic revolver over the gulf. The range was short. He could hardly miss.

Poignant eyes appealed to him like twin stars of steely blue. Death was near, but the other had not become unnerved. The Mercedes swerved slightly. It came closer, as if braving the leveled revolver. The upper fusilage of the German plane locked below Danton's lower surface. He held his fire as he swung away. They flew side by side to the beat of roaring exhausts.

The pilot of the Mercedes plane took both hands from the controls. Danton squared his jaw as he saw the movement. There was danger and death in it. He saw the

leather helmet lifted from a head of golden hair, as a queen might lift a crown. He all but lost control as a girl leaned over the marcelle and locked a pair of wide blue eyes into his own with a power he could not resist.

He lowered the automatic inch by inch, then let it drop within his lap. A red flush mounted his wind-dried cheeks. His hand trembled as he steadied the rushing pup.

The rush of blood died down slowly. He was unnerved for the first time in his life. There was danger now in flying at the speed the two planes were moving. He had passed Belfort, he knew. He could not circle and hold the other plane in the position he wanted it. The girl was still bent on escape.

He closed the gap between them, and signaled for her to keep to the south. Her face was hidden beneath the marcelle. The golden streamer of her hair seemed to strike back from the center of the propeller. Fair as she was, Danton realized that she was far too dangerous a flyer to allow to escape. She had accounted for seventeen or more English bird-men. She it was who had brought down little Connell.

Danton showed by the steady pressure he exerted toward the south that he wanted her to plane down and into French territory. He wanted the honor of taking her prisoner. It would be no more than his due.

She understood this maneuver. Her eyes lifted from a survey of the land below, and turned toward Danton. He nodded as she dipped with the Mercedes. He followed her plane, holding it in such a manner that it was always under the muzzle of the Lewis machine-gun. There was no escape for her, he thought. She was as much a prisoner as if they had been upon English soil, and he was following her to the detention camp.

Her descent was a long, swift glide. He circled as she landed upon an open space between rows of poplars. It was dangerous, extreme, but he followed her, further down the aisle. His plane bumped the ground, rose, then settled and came to a rocking halt. He sprang out, drew his automatic, and ran back through the grass.

The Mercedes had broken a wheel and a wing-strut in alighting. Its engine gave forth an oily vapor as it cooled. The girl stood waiting for him. Her hair had been rapidly tied into a hempen knot. Her figure seemed heavy in the leathern costume she wore. She towered over Danton, as he came to her side and bowed, as some Minerva or statue to Diana.

"You surrender?" he said, half in question, half in command.

The girl's eyes were proud and disdainful. The oil that had spattered her features in landing, drove all thought of romance from Danton's intentions. She looked the part she had played.

Danton repeated his request. His hand dropped to the butt of his automatic. He did not draw it, however. The girl had turned, slightly, and thrown back her head. She searched the surrounding country with a tiny glint of amusement in her blue eyes. Her hand raised to her hair and pressed a coil back from her forehead. She shielded her eyes with the hollow of her palm, then smiled as her lips parted over an even row of perfect teeth.

It was Danton's turn to be anxious. There was an assurance in his captor's posture that led him to believe that she was expecting help from some source. She seemed to know the spot upon which they had both landed. It was upon the shelf of a highland, back of which rose the first hills of the Alps. He heard a river and falling of waters below and beyond the row of poplars. He listened to the sounds that stirred the still air, and caught the measured chime of some village bell. It was high noon, he concluded. They seemed to be far from strife, and the war's grim influence.

The girl had found a tiny mirror while he was searching. With this she had succeeded in removing most of the oil and grime from her cheeks. She turned, as she replaced the mirror within her breast, and regarded Danton with level-drawn brows. He saw a light within the depths of her eyes that was never of the bird-woman and the Avenger. She had softened.

"Come," she said, almost queenly. "I want to show you where we are. I know

this place. I am not your prisoner and you are not my captor. We—you and I are—"

The girl's voice rose to a musical laugh. She turned and held out her hand. "Come, let's be friends," she said. "You gave me my life, although you took Karl's — my brother's."

The anxiety in her voice was a softening accusation. She seemed to have prepared for a blow. It was all in war to bring down bird-men. They were the eyes of the armies. One "ace" flyer was worth ten thousand men. Danton realized that the girl had harmed the Allies more than any living woman. She had become the Avenger in order to avenge the supposed death of her brother. It was all in the game.

"He is not dead," answered Danton simply.

"Karl—living?"

"Yes—in the detention camp. I thought you were Karl when I saw you yesterday. There is a resemblance—you fly like him."

"Are you sure he lives?" The note of sheer joy in her voice came to Danton as an unearned reward.

"He lives! If he didn't write it is because he doesn't want to. He can! Perhaps he never forgot, or forgave me for bringing him down. He seemed that way. We were in the hospital together—he was burned in falling. He's well now, Avenger."

The revelation brought a touch of color to the cheeks of the girl. She glanced down, archly, at Danton. "I didn't know," she whispered. "I didn't know you had spared him. And you are an *Engländer?* Come, I want to show you where we landed."

Danton felt as in the presence of some penitent queen, who had slain and wished to be forgiven. The sex in her had come back with rushing force. She was no longer the Avenger and the despair of the Royal Flying Corps. The motive that had driven her into the air had never existed. It had been a fancied wrong, nursed by a proud spirit. There were such women in Germany and in England, but not many.

He forgave her as they reached the edge.

A village with quaint roofs lay, seemingly, at their feet. Danton swept this Alpine view with troubled eyes. He turned and sought for the landmarks of the fortress of Belfort. It was then that his fists clinched. Doubt as to his locality shot through the old wound in his breast. He faced the bird-woman accusingly.

She stepped to the edge of the gulf and glanced down. Her brows lifted as she said:

"See, *Engländer*. See the soldiers coming up the valley. They are coming after us—a full company of them."

"Blue devils?" asked Danton.

"No, *Engländer*. Not Blue Devils. Do they look like French?"

Danton's lips closed as he recognized their nationality. He had been lured by the girl into Switzerland. The soldiers were Alpine scouts.

His eyes blazed as he strode to her side. "You—" he started to say, then paused in wonder.

The girl was swaying upon the edge. Her hands pressed to her breast as her cheeks blanched white. She leaned over the brink. He sprang forward and grasped her about the waist. It was in time. Her heart beat wildly against his side as he drew her to safety.

"What is it?" he asked softly.

"I went dizzy, *Engländer*. I looked down. I've lost the bird sense. I can never fly again. What has happened, *Engländer?*"

"Your sweet sex has returned," answered Danton. "You're a girl—a woman with a soul, now. There was a time when you didn't have any."

Her answer was to turn and glance archly down at him. Her cheeks reddened as she asked: "I'm as you would have me, then?"

When a woman capitulates, it is unconditionally. Danton's pup was undamaged, and the Swiss soldiers had a long way to climb. Also the pup made nothing of the light extra weight of the girl. So when the panting soldiers reached the plateau all they saw was a badly wrecked Mercedes, and a fast disappearing speck in the heavens, headed toward the distant British lines.

Karl's sister was on her way to join him —for a while.

The Devil's Own

by Randall Parrish

Author of "Contraband," "When Wilderness Was King," "The Red Mist," etc.

CHAPTER XXIV.

KIRBY AND I MEET.

SAL remained seated behind the bar, nodding, and, so soon as I felt reasonably assured that she was without interest in my movements, I leaned forward, and endeavored to arouse Kennedy. This was by no means easy of accomplishment, and I was compelled to pinch the fellow rather severely before he sat up angrily, blurting out the first words which came to his lips:

"What the devil—"

His half-opened eyes caught my gesture for silence, and he stopped instantly, his lips widely parted.

"Meet me outside," I whispered, warningly. "But be careful about it."

The slight noise had failed to disturb the woman, and I succeeded in slipping through the unlatched door without noting any change in her posture. Tim, now thoroughly awake, and aware of something serious in the air, was not long in joining me without, and I drew him aside into a spot of deeper blackness under the trees. He was still indignant over the pinching, and remained drunk enough to be quarrelsome. I cut his muffled profanity short.

"That's quite enough of that, Tim," I said sharply, and was aware that he stared back at me, plainly perplexed by the change in my tone and manner. "You are an officer of the law; so am I, and it is about time we were working together."

He managed to release a gruff laugh.

"You — you damn bum; hell, that's a good joke—what are yer givin' me now?"

"The exact truth; and it will be worth your while, my man, to brace up and listen. I am going to give you a chance to redeem yourself—a last chance. It will be a nice story to tell back in St. Louis that you helped to kidnap a wealthy young white woman, using your office as a cloak for the crime; and, besides that, killing two men to serve a river gambler. Suppose I was to tell that sort of tale to Governor Clark, and give him the proofs—where would you land?"

He breathed hard, scarcely able to articulate, but decidedly sober.

"What—what's that? Ain't you the fellar thet wus on the boat? Who—who the devil are yer?"

"I am an officer in the army," I said gravely, determined to impress him first of all, "and I worked on that steamer merely to learn the facts in this case. I know the whole truth, now, even to your late quarrel with Kirby. I do not believe you realized before what you were doing—but you do now. You are guilty of assisting that contemptible gambler to abduct Eloise Beaucaire, and are shielding him now in his cowardly scheme to compel her to marry him by threat and force."

"The damn, low-lived pup—I told him whut he wus."

"Yes, but that doesn't prevent the crime. He's all you said, and more. But calling

This story began in the All-Story Weekly for September 1.

the man names isn't going to frighten him, nor get that girl out of his clutches. What I want to know is, are you ready to help me fight the fellow? Block his game?"

"How? What do ye want done?"

"Give me a pledge first, and I'll tell you."

He took a long moment of silence to decide, not yet wholly satisfied as to my identity.

"Did ye say ye wus an army offercer?"

"Yes; a lieutenant; my name is Knox."

"I never knowed yer."

"Probably not, but Joe Kirby does. I was on the steamer Warrior coming down when he robbed old Judge Beaucaire. That was what got me mixed up in this affair. Later I was in that skiff you fellows rammed and sunk on the Illinois. I know the whole dirty story, Kennedy, from the very beginning. And now it is up to you whether, or not, I tell it to Governor Clark."

"I reckon yer must be right," he admitted helplessly. "Only I quit cold the minute I caught on ter whut wus up. I never knowed she wa'n't no nigger till after we got yere. Sures yer live that's true. Only then I didn't know whut else ter do, so I got bilin' drunk."

"You are willing to work with me, then?"

"Yer kin bet I am; I ain't no gurl stealer."

"Then listen, Kennedy. Jack Rale told me exactly what their plans were, because he needed me to help him. When you jumped the reservation, he had to find some one else, and picked me. The first thing he did, however, was to get you drunk, so you wouldn't interfere. That was part of their game, and Kirby came into the saloon a few minutes ago to see how it worked. He stood there and laughed at you, lying asleep. They mean to pull off the affair tonight. Here's the story."

I told it to him, exactly in the form it had come to me, interrupted only in the recital by an occasional profane ejaculation, or some interjected question. The deputy appeared sober enough before I had finished, and fully grasped the seriousness of the situation.

"Now, that is the way it stacks up," I ended. "The girl is to be taken to this fellow's shack and compelled to marry Kirby, whether she wants to or not. They will have her where she cannot help herself —away from any one to whom she could appeal. Rale wouldn't explain what means were to be used to make her consent, and I didn't dare press him for fear he might suspect me. They either intend threatening her, or else to actually resort to force—likely both. No doubt they can rely on this renegade preacher in either case."

"Jack didn't name no name?"

"No—why?"

"Only thar uster be a bum hangin' round the river front in Saint Louee who had preacher's papers, en wore a long-tailed coat. Thar wa'n't no low-down game he wouldn't take a hand in fer a drink. His name wus Gaskins; I had him up fer mayhem wunst. I'll bet he's the duck, fer he hung round Jack's place most o' the time. Whatcha want me ter do?"

"It has seemed to me, Tim," I said thoughtfully, "that the best action for us to take will be to let them place the girl in my hands, just as they have planned to do. That will throw them entirely off their guard. As things stand, I have no knowledge where she is concealed, or where to hunt for her; but it is evident she is in no immediate danger. They don't dare to force action here in this camp. Once we succeed in getting her safely away, and remain unknown ourselves, there ought to be very little trouble in straightening out the whole matter. My plan would be to either ride around the camp in the night, and then report the whole affair at headquarters or else to strike out direct for Fort Armstrong across country. The Indians will all be cleaned out north of here, and they know me at Armstrong. Do you know any place you can pick up a horse?"

"Thar's a slew ov 'em round yere," he admitted; "these fellers are most all hoss-soldiers. I reckon I could cinch sum sort o' critter. Yer want me along?"

"Perhaps not, Tim. Your disappearance might cause suspicion, and send them after us. My plan is to get away as quietly as possible, and let them believe everything

is all right. I want a day or two in which to work, before Rale or Kirby discover we have not gone to Bear Creek. I'll meet them alone at the spring down the trail, but shall want you somewhere near by. You see this is bound to mean a fight if I am recognized—likely three against one; and those men wouldn't hesitate at murder."

"I reckon not, an' it wouldn't be their furst one, nuther. Looks ter me like yer wus takin' a big chance. I'll be thar, though; yer kin bet on thet, an' ready fer a fight, er a foot-race. This is how I size it up—if thar ain't no row, I'm just ter keep still, an' lie low; an' if a fracas starts, I'm ter jump in fer all I'm worth. Is thet the program?"

"Exactly—that's my idea."

"Waal, then, I'm a prayin' it starts; I want just one crack et thet Kirby, the ornary cuss."

We talked the whole matter over in detail, having nothing better to do, and endeavoring to arrange for every probability, yet did not remain together for long. With my eyes to a chink between the logs I got a view of the interior of the cabin. The two card-players had disappeared, and I imagined they were rolled up in blankets in one corner of the room. Sal was alone, seated on a stool, her head hanging forward, sound asleep. Evidently she had received no orders from Rale to keep watch over the movements of either of us, and was not worried on account of our absence. In all probability the saloon-keeper believed the deputy was drunk enough to remain in stupor all night, and he considered my services as bought and paid for. He had traded with derelicts of my apparent kind before.

I felt nervous, anxious, eager for action. The time dragged horribly. If I could only be accomplishing something; or if I knew what was occurring elsewhere. What if something unforeseen should occur to change Rale's plan? Suppose, for instance, those fellows should decide to force the marriage to-night, instead of waiting until after arrival at Jenkins's Crossing? Suppose she resisted them, and was injured? A suspicion came to me that I might have misunderstood all this. If I only knew where it was they had concealed the girl.

The two of us explored about the silent cabin, but discovered nothing. There was no light visible in the rear room, nor any sound of movement within. The two windows were closed, and the door locked. We found a convenient stump in the woods, and sat down to wait, where we could see all that occurred about the cabin. The distant camp-fires had died down, and only occasionally did any sound, generally far away, disturb the silence. The night was fairly dark, the stars shining brightly enough, but dense beneath the trees; yet we managed to locate the nearer sentries by their voices when they reported posts. None were stationed close by. Everything indicated that we were safely outside the lines of camp.

We conversed in whispers, until Tim, still influenced by his excessive drinking, became sleepy, and slid off the stump onto the ground, where he curled up on a pile of leaves. I let him lie undisturbed, and continued my vigil alone, feeling no inclination to sleep, every nerve throbbing almost painfully. Three or four men straggled into the saloon while I sat there, coming from the direction of the camp, and were doubtless waited upon by Sal. None remained long within, and all I saw of them were indistinct figures revealed for a moment as the light streamed out through the opened door. One seemed to be an officer, wrapped in a cavalry cloak—hunting after men out of bounds, possibly—but, later than eleven o'clock, there were no more callers. Soon after that hour the light within was turned low.

All the while I remained there, motionless, intently watchful for every movement about me, with Tim peacefully asleep on the leaves, my thought was with Eloise Beaucaire, and my mind torn with doubt as to the wisdom of my choice. Had I determined on the right course? Was there nothing else I could do? Was it best for me to thus rely on my own efforts? Or should I have sought the assistance of others? Yet where could I turn? How could I gain in time such assistance?

I realized in those moments that selfish-

ness, love, personal desire, had very largely influenced me in my decision—I was eager to rescue her alone, by my own efforts, unaided. I had to confess this to be my secret purpose. I could dream of nothing else, and was actually unwilling to share this privilege with any other. I felt she belonged to me; determined she should belong to me. From that instant, when I became convinced that she was of white blood —that no hideous barrier of race, no stain of dishonor, held us apart — she had become my one ambition.

I not only knew that I loved her; but I believed almost as strongly that she loved me. Every glance of her eyes, each word she had spoken, remained indelibly in my memory. And beyond doubt she thought me dead. Kirby would have told her that both men in the wrecked boat went down. It would be to his advantage to impress this on her mind, so as to thus emphasize her helplessness, and cause her to realize that no one knew of her predicament. What an awakening it would be when she again recognized me as actually alive and beside her. Surely in that moment I should read the whole truth in those wonderful eyes, and reap my reward in her first impulse of gratitude. It was not in nature to share such a moment with another; I wanted it for myself alone.

It was nearly twelve before even the slightest sound near at hand indicated the approach of others. I was already in an agony of suspense, imagining something might have gone wrong, when the dull scuffling of horses' hoofs being led cautiously up the trail to my right, broke the intense silence. I listened to assure myself, then shook Tim into wakefulness, leaving him still blinking in the shadow of the stump, while I advanced in the direction of the spring. Suddenly the darker shape of the slowly moving animals loomed up through the gloom, and came to a halt directly in front of me. I saw nothing of Rale until he spoke.

"Thet yer, Moffett?"

"Yes; whar's yer party?"

I caught view of his dim outlines as he stepped slightly forward, reassured by my voice.

"They'll be yere; thar's a bit o' time ter spare yit. I aimed not ter keep 'em waitin'. Here, this is yer hoss, an' yere's the leadin' strap fer the others. Better tie it ter yer pommel, I reckon, so's ter leave both yer hands free—yer mout hav' need fer 'em. We'll tend ter mountin' the gurls, an' then all ye'll have ter do will be ter lead off. Thar won't be no talkin' done yere. Better walk the hosses till yer git 'crost the crick, so the sojers won't hear yer. Got that?"

"I reckon I have, an' sense 'nough ter know it without bein' told. Did yer think I wanted ter be catched on this job?"

"All right, but thar's no harm a tellin' yer. Don't be so damn touchy. Eneyboddy in the shack?"

"No; only the woman, asleep on a stool."

"Whar's Tim gone to?"

"I reckon he don't even know hisself; he's sure sum drunk."

Rale chuckled, patting the side of the horse next him.

"Whole caboodle workin' like a charm," he said good-humoredly. "Thought wunst the deputy might show up ugly, but a quart o' red-eye sure fixed him—thar's our party a comin' now. Yer're ter stay right whar ye are."

They were advancing toward us up the bank which sloped down toward the creek. It occurred to me they must be following some well-worn path, from the silence of their approach—the only sound being a faint rustling of dead leaves. Rale moved forward to meet them across the little open space, and a moment later, from my hiding-place among the motionless horses, I became able to distinguish the slowly approaching figures. There were four in the party, apparently from their garb two men and two women. The second man might be the preacher, but if so, why should he be there? Why should his presence at this time be necessary? Unless the two main conspirators had special need for his services, I could conceive no reason for his having any part in the action that night. Had I been deceived in their plans?

The horror of the dawning conception that possibly I had waited too long, and

that the deed I sought to prevent had already been consummated, left me trembling like an aspen. Even as this fear overwhelmed me with consternation, I was compelled to notice how helplessly the first of the two women walked — as though her limbs refused to support her body—even though apparently upheld by the grip of the man beside her. Rale, joining them, immediately grasped her other arm, and, between the two, she was impelled forward. The saloon-keeper seemed unable to restrain his voice.

"Yer must 'a' give her one hell o' a dose," he growled angrily. "Half o' thet would 'a' bin 'nough. Why, damn it, she kin hardly walk."

"Well, what's the odds?" It was Kirby who replied sarcastically. "She got more because she wouldn't drink. We had to make her take it, and it wasn't no easy job. Gaskins will tell you that. Have you got your man here?"

"O' course; he's waitin' thar with the hosses. But I'm damned if I like this. She don't know nuthin', does she?"

"Maybe not now; but she'll come around all right, and she signed her name. So there ain't no hitch. She seemed to get worse after that. Come on, we can't stand talking here; let's get them off, Jack, there isn't any time to waste. I suppose we'll have to strap her into the saddle."

I held back, and permitted them to work, merely leading my own horse slightly to one side, and keeping in his shadow. I doubt if Kirby even glanced toward me, although if he did, he saw only an ill-defined figure, with no glimpse of my face. But the chances were that I was nothing to him at that moment; a mere floating bum whom Rale had picked up to do this job; and just then his whole attention was concentrated upon the half-conscious girl, and his desire to get her safely out of that neighborhood. My presence meant nothing of special interest. Gaskins brutally jerked the shrinking mulatto forward, and forced her to mount one of the horses. She made some faint protest, the nature of which I failed to catch clearly, but the fellow only laughed in reply, and ordered her to keep quiet. Eloise uttered no word, emitted no sound, made no struggle, as the two other men lifted her bodily into the saddle, where Kirby held her, swaying helplessly against him, while Rale strapped her into place.

The entire proceedings were so brutally cruel that it required all my strength of will to restrain myself from action. My fingers closed upon the pistol in my pocket, and every impulse urged me to hurl myself on the fellows, trusting everything to swift, bitter fight. I fairly trembled in eagerness to grapple with Kirby, hand to hand, and crush him helpless to the earth. I heard his voice, hateful and snarling, as he cursed Rale for his slowness, and the hot blood boiled in my veins when he jerked the girl upright in the saddle.

"Thar," said the saloon-keeper, at last, testing his strap. "I reckon she can't fall off nohow, even if she don't sit up worth a damn. Go ahead now, Moffett."

Both the men stepped aside, and I led my horse forward. The movement brought me more into the open, and face to face with Kirby. By some trick of fate, at that very instant a star-gleam, piercing through the screen of leaves overhead, struck full into my eyes. With an oath he thrust my hat back, and stared straight at me.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE FUGITIVES.

I COULD not see the mingled hate and horror glaring in the man's eyes, but there could be no doubt of his recognition. The acknowledgment found expression in a startled exclamation:

"By God—you, here!"

That was all the time I gave him. With every pound of strength, with every ounce of dislike, I drove a clinched fist into that surprised face, and the fellow went down as though smitten by an ax. Even as he reeled, Rale leaped on me, cursing, failing to understand the cause, yet instinctively realizing the presence of an enemy. He caught me from behind, the very weight of his heavy body throwing me from balance, although I caught one of his arms, as he attempted to strike, and locked with him in desperate struggle.

He was a much heavier and stronger man than I, accustomed to barroom fighting, reckless of method, caring for nothing except to get his man. His grip was at my throat, and, even as his fingers closed savagely, he struck me with one knee in the stomach, and drove an elbow straight into my face. The next instant we were locked together so closely any blow became impossible, youth and agility waging fierce battle against brutal strength. I think I was his match, yet this I never knew—for all my thought centered in an effort to keep his hands from reaching any weapon.

Whatever happened to me there must be no alarm, no noise sufficiently loud so as to attract the attention of sentries on guard. This affair must be fought out with bare knuckles, and straining sinews—fought in silence to the end. I held him to me in a bear grip, but his overmastering strength bore me backward, my body bending beneath the strain until every muscle ached.

"Damn you—you sneakin' spy!" he hissed savagely, and his jaws snapped at me like a mad beast. "Let go! damn you—let go!"

Crazed by the pain, I swerved to one side, and half fell, my grip torn loose from about his arms, but as instantly closing again around his lower body. He strained, but failed to break my grasp, and I should have hurled him over the hip, but at that second Gaskins struck me, and I went tumbling down, with the saloon-keeper falling flat on top of me, his pudgy fingers still clawing fiercely at my throat.

It seemed as though consciousness left my brain, crushed into death by those gripping hands, and yet the spark of life remained, for I heard the ex-preacher utter a yelp, which ended in a moan, as a blow struck him; then Rale was jerked off me, and I sobbingly caught my breath, my throat free. Into my dazed mind there echoed the sound of a voice.

"Is thet 'nough, Jack? Then holler. Damn yer, yer try thet agin, an' I'll spill whut brains ye got all over this kintry. Yes, it's Tim Kennedy talkin', an' he's talkin' ter ye. Now yer lie whar yer are. Yer ain't killed, be ye Knox?"

I managed to lift myself out of the dirt, still clutching for breath, but with my mind clearing.

"No; I guess I'm all right, Tim," I said, panting out the words with an effort. "What's become of Kirby? Don't let him get away."

"I ain't likely to. He's a lyin' right whar yer dropped him. Holy Smoke! it sounded ter me like ye hit him with a pole-ax. I got his gun, an' thet's whut's makin' this skunk hold so blame still—oh, yes, I will, Jack Rale; I'm just a achin' fer ter let ye hav' it."

"And the other fellow? he hit me."

"My ol' frien', Gaskins; thet's him, all right." The deputy gave vent to a short, mirthless laugh. "Oh, I rapped him with the butt; had ter do it. He'd got hold ov a club somewhar, an' wus goin' ter give yer another. It will be a while, I reckon, fore he takes much interest. What'll I do with this red-headed gink?"

I succeeded in reaching my feet, and stood there a moment, gaining what view I could through the darkness. The short struggle, desperate as it had been, was not a noisy one, and I could hear nothing about us to indicate any alarm. No hurrying footsteps, no cries told of disturbance in any direction. Kirby rested exactly as he had fallen, and I stared down at the dim outlines of his distended body, unable to comprehend how my swift blow could have wrought such damage. I bent over him wonderingly, half believing he feigned unconsciousness. The fellow was alive, but his head lay upon a bit of jagged rock—this was what had caused serious injury, not the impact of my fist.

Kennedy had one hard knee pressed into Rale's abdomen, and the star-rays reflected back the steel glimmer of the pistol held threateningly before the man's eyes. The horses beyond stood motionless, the two women in the saddles no more than silent shadows. I stood up once more, peering about through the darkness, and listening. Whatever was to be done, I must decide, and quickly.

"Have Rale stand up, but keep him covered. Don't give him any chance to break away; now wait—there is a lariat rope hanging to this saddle; I'll get it."

It was a strong cord, and of good length; and we proceeded to bind the fellow securely in spite of his objections, I taking charge of the pistol, while Tim, who was more expert, did the job in a workmanlike manner. Rale ventured on no resistance, although he made no effort to restrain his tongue.

"Thar ain't no use pullin' thet rope so tight, yer ol' fule. By God, but yer goin' ter pay fer all this. Maybe ye think ye kin git away in this kintry; but I'll show ye. Damn nice trick yer two played, wa'n't it? The lafe will be on t'ougher side afore ter-morrer night. No, I won't shet up, an' ye can't make me—ye ain't done with this job yet. Curse ye, Tim Kennedy, let up on thet."

"Now gag him, Tim," I said quietly. "Yes, use the neckerchief. He can do more damage with his mouth than any other way. Good enough; you are an artist in your line; now help me drag him over here into the woods. He is a heavy one. That will do; all we can hope for is a few hours' start."

"Is Kirby dead?"

"I'm afraid not, but he has got an ugly bump, and lost some blood. His head struck a rock when he fell. It will be a while, I imagine, before he wakes up. How about your man?"

He crossed over and bent down above the fellow, feeling with his hands in the darkness.

"I reckon he's a gorner, cap," he admitted as though surprised. "Gosh, I must 'a' hit the cuss harder than I thought—fair caved in his he'd, the pore devil. I reckon it's no great loss ter nobody."

"But are you sure he is dead? That will put a different aspect on all this, Kennedy!" I exclaimed gravely, facing him as he arose to his feet. "That, and the belief I now have that Kirby has already consummated his plan of marriage with Miss Beaucaire."

"You mean he has—"

"Yes; that he has forced the girl to assent to some form of ceremony, probably legal in this country. I overheard enough between him and Rale to suspicion it, at least; and she is even now under the influence of some drug. She hasn't spoken, nor does she seem to know what is going on about her. They strapped her into the saddle."

"The hell they did!"

"It has been a hellish affair all the way through, and the only way in which I can serve her, if this is so, is by getting her away—as far away as possible, and where this devil can never find her again. She's got to be saved not only from him, but also from the scandal of it."

He stood silent, little more than a shadow before me, his head bent, as though struggling with a new thought, a fresh understanding.

"I reckon I kin see thet, sir, now." His voice somehow contained a new note of respect, as though the truth had suddenly dawned upon him. "I didn't just get hold o' things rightly afore; why an army offercer like yer should be mixed up in this sorter job. But I reckon I do, now—yer in love with her, yerself; ain't thet it, sir?"

"Yes, Tim," I confessed frankly, and not at all sorry to make the avowal. "That is the truth. Now what would you do, if you were in my place?"

"Just exactly whut yer doin', I reckon," he returned heartily. "Only, maybe I'd kill thet dirty skunk afore I went away; damned if I wouldn't."

"No, not in cold blood. I wouldn't have been sorry if he had died fighting, but murder is not my line. He deserves death, no doubt, but it is not possible for me to kill him lying there helpless. Just truss him up—. Hold on," I added excitedly, struck by a sudden thought. "We must search him first. He probably has some sort of a marriage certificate, and he spoke of Miss Beaucaire's having signed her name. If we can get hold of that paper—and destroy it—with the preacher dead, this dog would have no proof of the marriage. The girl herself will deny it—probably has no recollection of it."

We sprang to the unconscious form, searching hastily but thoroughly, but with no success; the paper was not on his person. Disappointed, I rose, looking questioningly toward the stiffening body of the renegade preacher, but Tim, noticing the look, shook his head.

"He wouldn't hev it," he said. "Joe's too smart; most like he's catched it in some safe place."

It seemed not unlikely, and in any case we had no more time to waste searching.

"Let it go," I replied, "I don't believe such a marriage is legal any way, and what bothers me most right now is your case."

"Mine? Lord, what's the matter with me?"

"Considerable, I should say. You cannot be left here alone to face the result of this night's work. If Gaskins is dead from the blow you struck him, these two fellows will swear your life away just for revenge. Even if you told the whole story, what chance would you have? That would only expose us, and still fail to clear you. It would merely be your word against theirs —you would have no witnesses, unless we were caught."

"I reckon thet's true; I wasn't thinkin' 'bout it."

"Then there is only one road to take, Tim," I insisted. "We've got to strike the trail together."

"Whar?"

"I cannot answer that now; I haven't thought it out yet. We can talk that matter over as we ride. I have a map with me, which will help us decide the best course to choose. The first thing is to get out of this neighborhood beyond pursuit. If you only had a horse."

"Thar's two critters down in the crick bottom. I reckon thet Kirby an' Gaskins must 'a' tied 'em thar."

"Good; then you will go? You agree with me?"

"Thar ain't nuthin' else fer me ter do—hangin' ain't never bin no hobby o' mine. As I understand it, this Gaskins wus one o' these yere militiamen. I reckon thet if these yere two bugs wus ter swear thet I killed him—as most likely they will—them boys would string me up furst, an' find out fer sure arterward. Thar ain't so damn much law up yere, an' thet's 'bout whut would happen. So the sooner I leave these yere parts the more like I am ter live a while yet."

"Then let's start," decisively. "Pick up one of those horses down on the bottom, and turn the other one loose. I'll lead on down the trail, and you can meet us at the ford—once across the creek we can decide which way to travel; there must be four hours of darkness yet."

I picked up the trailing rein of my horse and slipped my arm through it. Tim faded away in the gloom like a vanishing shadow. The young woman next me, strapped securely to her saddle, made no movement, exhibited no sign of interest; her head and body drooped, yet her hands grasped the pommel, as though she still retained some dim conception of her situation. The face under her hood was bent forward and shaded, and her eyes, although they seemed open, gave no heed to my presence. I touched her hands—thank God! they were moist and warm; but when I spoke her name, it brought no response. The other horse, ridden by the mulatto girl, was forced in between us.

"Who are ye?" she questioned, wonderingly. "Ye just called her by name, an' ye must know her. Whut ye goin' fer ter do with us, sah?"

I looked up toward her face, without distinguishing its outlines. I felt this was no time to explain; that every moment lost was of value.

"Never mind, now; I know who she is, and that you are Elsie Clark. We are your friends."

"No, he ain't—not thet other man; he ain't no friend o' mine, Ah tell ye. He's de one whut locked me up on de boat. Ah sure knowed his voice; he done locked me up, an' Ah's a free nigger."

"Forget that, Elsie; he's helping you now to get away. You do just what I tell you to, and above all, keep still. Miss Beaucaire was drugged, wasn't she?"

"Ah don't know, sah. She sure does act mighty queer; but Ah nebber see her take nuthin'. Ah nebber see nuthin' 'tall till dey took me outer de shack, an' galivanted me yere. Whar I heerd yer voice afore?"

"I haven't time to explain that; we are going now."

I started forward on foot, leading my horse, the others trailing after through the darkness. Knowing nothing of the way, I was thus better able to pick the path; yet

I found this not difficult, as it was rather plainly outlined by the forest growth on either side. It led downward at a gentle slope, although the grade was sufficiently steep to force Eloise's body forward, and compel me to support her as best I could with one arm. She still appeared to be staring directly ahead with unseeing eyes, although her hands clung as tightly as ever to the saddle pommel. I clinched my teeth, half crazed at the sight of her condition, yet feeling utterly helpless to do more. I spoke to her again, but received no answer; not the slightest evidence that she heard me.

The trail was clay, with a few small stones embedded in it, and the horses made little noise in their descent, except once when Elsie's animal slipped and sent a loosened bit of rock rolling down to splash in some pool below. We came to the bank of the creek at last, a narrow stream, easily fordable, but with a rather steep shore-line beyond, and waited there a moment, until Tim emerged from out the black woods at our right, and joined us. He was mounted, and, believing the time had arrived for more rapid movement, I also swung up into saddle, and ranged the girl's horse beside mine.

"It looks to be open country beyond there," I said, pointing across; "what little I can see of it. You better ride the other side of Miss Beaucaire, Tim, and help me hold her up—the colored girl can trail behind. We'll jog the horses a bit."

They were not stock to be proud of, yet they did fairly well, Tim's mount evidently the best of the four. The going was decidedly better once we had topped the bank. The stars were bright enough overhead to render the well-marked trail easily visible, and this led directly southward, across a rolling plain. We may have ridden for two miles without a word, for, although I had no intention of proceeding far in this direction, I could discover no opportunity for changing our course, so as to baffle pursuit.

That Kirby and Rale would endeavor to follow us at the earliest opportunity was most probable. They were neither of them the sort to accept defeat without a struggle; and, after the treatment they had received, the desire for revenge would be uppermost. Nor thus far would there be any difficulty in their picking up our trail, at least as far as the creek crossing; and this would assure them the direction we had chosen. Beyond the ford tracing our movements might prove more troublesome, as the short, wiry grass under foot retained but slight imprint of unshod hoofs, the soil beneath being of a hard clay. Yet to strike directly out across the prairie would be a dangerous experiment.

Then, suddenly, out of the mysterious darkness which closed us in, another grove loomed up immediately in our front, and the trail plunged sharply downward into the depths of a rugged ravine. I was obliged to dismount, and feel my way cautiously to the bottom, delighted to discover there a smoothly-flowing, narrow stream, running from the eastward between high banks, overhung by trees. It was a dismal, gloomy spot, a veritable cave of darkness, yet apparently the very place I had been seeking for our purpose. I could not even perceive the others, but the restless movement of their horses told me of their presence.

"Kennedy."

"Right yere, sir. Lord, but it's dark—found enything?"

"There is a creek here. I don't know where it flows from, but it seems to come out of the east. One thing is certain; we have got to get off this trail. If we can lead the horses up-stream a ways, and then circle back, it would keep those fellows guessing for a while. Come here and see what you think of the chance."

He was not to exceed two yards away from me, but came shuffling uncertainly forward, feeling gingerly for footing in the blackness along the rock-strewn bank. His outstretched hand touched me, startling us, before we were aware of our closeness.

"Hell, but I'm as blind as a bat," he laughed. "Is this the crick? How wide is it?"

"I just waded across; about five yards, and not more than two feet deep."

"Maybe it's blocked up above."

"Of course it might be, but it seems like a chance worth taking. We are sure to be caught if we hang to this trail."

"I reckon thet's so. Ye let me go ahead

with the nigger gurl, an' then follow after us, leadin' Miss Beaucaire's hoss. By jeminy crickets, 'taint deep 'nough fer ter drown us enyway, an' I ain't much afeered o' the dark. Thar's likely ter be sum place whar we kin get out up thar. Whar the hell are them hosses?"

We succeeded in locating the animals by feeling, and I waited on the edge of the bank, the two reins wrapped about my arm, until I heard the others go splashing down into the water. Then I also groped my own way cautiously forward, the two horses trailing behind me, down the sharply-shelving bank into the stream. Tim chose his course close to the opposite shore, and I followed his lead closely, guided largely by the splashing of Elsie's animal through the shallow water. Our movement was a very slow and cautious one, Kennedy halting frequently to assure himself that the passage ahead was safe. Fortunately, the bottom was firm, and the current not particularly strong, our greatest obstacle being the low-hanging branches which swept against us. Much time was spent in holding these back from contact with Eloise's face, our horses sedately plodding along.

I think we must have waded thus to exceed a mile, when we came to a fork in the stream, and plumped into a tangle of uprooted trees, which ended our further progress. Between the two branches, after a little search, we discovered a gravelly beach, on which the horse's hoofs would leave few permanent marks. Beyond this gravel we plunged into an open wood, through whose intricacies we were compelled to grope blindly, Tim and I both afoot, and constantly calling to each other, so as not to become separated. I had lost all sense of direction, when this forest finally ended, and we again emerged upon open prairie, with a myriad of stars shining overhead.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE ISLAND IN THE SWAMP.

THE relief of thus being able to perceive each other, and gain some view of our immediate surroundings, after that struggle through darkness, cannot be expressed in words. My first thought was for the girl, whose horse I had been leading, but her eyes were no longer open, and staring vacantly forward; they were now tightly closed, and to all appearances she slept soundly in the saddle. In the first shock of so discovering her I touched her flesh to assure myself that she was not dead, but the blood was flowing warm, and lifelike through her veins. She breathed so naturally I felt this slumber must be a symptom of recovery.

We were upon a rather narrow tongue of land, the two diverging forks of the stream closing us in. So, after a short conversation, we continued to ride straight forward, keeping rather closely to the edge of the woods, so as to better conceal our passage. Our advance, while not rapid, was steady, and we must have covered several miles before the east began to show gray, the ghastly light of the new dawn revealing our tired faces.

Ahead of us stretched an extensive swamp, with pools of stagnant water shimmering through lush grass, and brown fringes of cat-tails bordering their edges. Seemingly our further advance was stopped, nor could we determine the end of the morass confronting us. Some distance out in this desolation, and only half revealed through the dim light, a somewhat higher bit of land, rocky on its exposed side, its crest crowned with trees, arose like an island. Tim stared across at it, shading his eyes with one hand.

"If we wus goin' ter stop enywhar, cap," he said finally, "I reckon thar ain't no better place then thet, pervidin' we kin git thar."

I followed his gaze, and noticed that the mulatto girl also lifted her head to look.

"We certainly must rest," I confessed. "Miss Beaucaire seems to be sleeping, but I am sure is thoroughly exhausted. Do you see any way of getting across the swamp?"

He did not answer, but Elsie instantly pointed toward the left, crying out eagerly:

"Sure, Ah do. The lan' is higher 'long thar, sah—yer kin see shale rock."

"So you can; it almost looks like a dike. Let's try it, Tim."

It was not exactly a pleasant passage, or a safe one, but the continual increase in light aided us in picking our way, above the black water on either hand. I let my horse follow those in front as he pleased, and held tightly to the bit of the one bearing Eloise. It had to be made in single file, and we encountered two serious breaches in the formation when the animals nearly lost their footing, the hind limbs of one, indeed, sliding into the muck, but finally reached the island end, clambering up through a fissure in the rock, and emerging upon the higher dry ground.

The island thus attained proved a small one, not to exceed a hundred yards wide, rather sparsely covered with forest trees, the space between these thick with undergrowth. What first attracted my gaze after penetrating the tree fringe was the glimpse of a small shack, built of poles, and thatched with coarse grass, which stood nearly in the center of the island. It was a rudely constructed, primitive affair, and to all appearance deserted. My first thought was that we had stumbled upon some Indian hut, yet felt it safer to explore its interior before permitting the others to venture closer.

"Hold the horses here, Tim; let me see what we have ahead first."

I approached the place from the rear, peering in through the narrow openings betwen the upright poles. The light was so poor I was not able to perceive much, but did succeed in fully convincing myself that the dismal shack was unoccupied. The door stood unlatched, and I pushed it open. A single glance served to reveal everything the place contained. Without doubt it had been the late abode of Indians, who, in all probability had fled hastily to join Black Hawk in his foray up Rock River. There was no pretense at furniture of any description—nothing, indeed, but bare walls, and trampled dirt floor; but what interested me most was a small bit of jerked deer meat which still hung against an upright, and the rude stone fireplace in the center of the hut, with an opening above to carry away the smoke.

I had found during the night a fair supply of hard bread in my saddle-bag, and now, with this additional gift of Providence, felt assured, at least, of one sufficient meal. I stood there for perhaps a minute, staring wonderingly about that gloomy interior, but making no further discoveries; then returned without, and called to the others.

"It is all right, Tim, there is no one here. An old Indian camp, with nothing but a hunk of jerked deer meat left behind. Elsie, gather some of that old wood yonder, and build a fire. Kennedy and I will look after Miss Beaucaire."

It was bright day by this time, the red of the rising sun in the sky, and I could trace the radius of swamp land stretching about us on every hand, a grim, desolate scene even in the beauty of that clear dawn. We had been fortunate enough to approach the spot along the only available pathway which led to this little oasis, and a more secure hiding-place it would be difficult to find. The tree growth, and heavy underbrush completely concealed the miserable shack from view in every direction; and what faint trail we had left behind us since we took to the water of the creek, would be extremely hard to follow. I felt almost at ease for the present, and satisfied to rest here for several hours.

Tim assisted me in unstrapping Eloise, and lifting her from the saddle, and, as she made no effort to help herself, the two of us carried her to a warm, sunny spot beside the wall of the hut. Her cramped limbs refused to support her body, and her eyes, then open, yet retained that vacant look so noticeable from the first. The only change was in the puzzled way with which she stared into our faces, as though memory might be struggling back, and she was vaguely endeavoring to understand.

Except for this pathetic look, she had never appeared more attractive to my eyes, with color in cheeks and lips. Her hood had fallen backward, revealing her glossy hair still smoothly brushed, while the brilliancy of the sunlight, tinting it with gold, only made more manifest the delicate beauty of her features. Tim led the horses away, and staked them out where they could crop the rich, dewy

grass. After removing the saddles, he followed the mulatto girl into the hut, and I could hear the murmur of their voices. I endeavored to address Eloise, seeking thus to awaken her to some sense of my presence; but she merely smiled meaninglessly, leaned her head wearily back against the poles, and closed her eyes.

It was a poor meal enough, although it sufficed to dull hunger, and yield us some strength. Eloise succeeded in choking down a few morsels, but drank thirstily. It was pitiful to watch her, and to mark the constant effort she was making to force the return of memory. Her eyes, dull, uncomprehending, wandered continually from face to face in our little group, but no flash of intelligence lighted their depths. I had Elsie bathe her face with water, and while, no doubt, this refreshed her somewhat, she only rested her head back on my coat, which I had folded for a pillow, and again closed her heavy eyes. The negress appeared so tired I bade her lie down and sleep, and soon after Tim also disappeared. I remained there alone, guarding the woman I loved.

I had reason enough myself to be weary, yet was not conscious of the slightest desire to rest. My mind did not crave sleep. That Eloise had been drugged for a purpose was now beyond controversy; but what the nature of that drug might be, and how it could be combated, were beyond my power to determine. Even if I knew, the only remedies at hand were water, and fresh air. And how were we to escape, burdened by this helpless girl, from the pursuit, which, perhaps, had already started from Yellow Banks? At all hazards I must now prevent this dazed, stupefied woman from ever falling into the power of Joe Kirby. That was the one fact I knew. I would rather kill her with my own hand, for I was convinced the fellow actually possessed a legal right, which I could not hope to overthrow.

However, it had been accomplished, through what villainy, made no odds—she was his wife, and could only be released through the process of law. He could claim her, hold her in spite of me, in spite of herself. No influence I might bring to bear would save her now from this contamination. It would all be useless, a thing for laughter. Her signature—of which Kirby had boasted—and the certificate signed by the dead Gaskins, would offset any possible effort I might put forth. There remained no hope except through flight; outdistancing our pursuers; finding a route to safety through the wilderness which they would never suspect.

Where could such a route be found? In which direction was it safest for us to turn? Surely not southward down the river seeking refuge at Fort Madison; nor in the opposite direction toward Fort Armstrong. I thought of both these, but only to dismiss them from consideration. Had it not been for this marriage, either might have been answered; but now they would prove no protection. Those men whom we were seeking to escape would remember these points at once, and suspicion our fleeing to either one or the other. There was no power there able to protect her from the lawful authority of the husband. Nor could she deny that authority, if he held in his hands the proof. No, I must find an unknown path, an untraveled trail. Our only hope lay in baffling pursuit, in getting far beyond Kirby's grip.

For the moment I felt reasonably safe where we were—but only for the moment. We could rest on this isolated island, barely lifting itself above the swamp, and plan our future, but within the limits of another day, probably, those fellows would discover signs of our passage, faint as they were, and follow us. I dragged the map out from its silk wrapping, and spread it forth on the ground between my knees. It was the latest government survey, given me when I first departed for the north, and I already knew every line, and stream by heart. I bent over it in uncertainty, studying each feature, gradually determining the better course, weighing this consideration, and that.

I became so interested in the problem as to entirely forget her presence, but, when I finally lifted my head, our eyes met, and I instantly read in the depths of hers the dawning of recognition. They were no longer dull, dead, emotionless, but aglow

with returning life—puzzled, unassured, yet clearly conscious.

"Who are you?" she breathed incredulously, lifting herself upon one hand. "Oh, surely I know—Lieutenant Knox! Why, where am I? What has happened? Oh, God! You do not need to tell me that! But you! I cannot understand about you. They—they said you died."

"They must have said much to deceive you," and I bent forward to touch her hand. "See, I am very much alive. Let me tell you—that will be the quickest way to understand. In the first place I did not drown when the boat was smashed, but was rendered helpless, and borne away on the water. I drifted through the darkness out into the Mississippi, and later became caught on a snag in the middle of that stream. The Adventurer rescued me about daylight the next morning, and I was no sooner on board that I was told how the keel-boat had been run down below on the river during the night, and that your party had all been saved—two white men, and two negress slaves. Of course I knew you must be one of them."

"Then—then we were actually together, on the same boat, all the way up here?"

"Yes; I tried hard to find where you were concealed on board, but failed. I might not have helped you, but I thought you would be glad to know I was alive. Kirby guarded you with great care from all observation. Do you know why?"

Her wide-opened eyes gazed into mine frankly, but her lips trembled.

"Yes," she answered, as though forcing herself to speak. "I do know now. I thought I knew then, but was mistaken. I supposed it might be because I looked so little like a negress; but now I realize it was his own conscience. He knew I was a white woman; he had become convinced that I was Eloise Beaucaire. Did you know that, also?"

"I learned the truth on the boat, from the same source where Kirby obtained his information. Elsie Clark told me."

"Elsie Clark! Who is she? How did she know?

"A free negress, who had been employed by Amos Shrunk. She was the other prisoner on the keel-boat, when you were captured, kept locked below in the cabin. Surely you knew there was another woman taken aboard the Adventurer?"

"Yes, but we never spoke; she was below, and they kept me on deck. How could she know who I was?"

"She did not. Only she was positive that you could not be Rene Beaucaire, because she knew that Rene, in company with her mother, had departed from Shrunk's cabin before those raiders came. The two had already started for Beardstown."

She sat upright, all lassitude gone from her body, leaning eagerly toward me, her eyes alight with interest.

"Gone! Rene escaped them!" she exclaimed, her voice choking. "Oh, tell me that again. Was the girl sure?"

"Quite sure; she had cooked them breakfast, and talked with Rene afterwards. She saw, and spoke with both the women, before they left in a wagon. They were on the Underground, bound for Canada, and safety."

"Thank God! Oh, I thank God!" Her face sank until it was concealed within her hands. When it lifted again, the eyes were brimming with tears.

"I am so glad—so glad," she said simply. "Now I am strong enough to hear the rest, Lieutenant Knox. You must tell me."

"There is not so much to tell, that I am cock-sure about," I began, slowly. "Kirby had you securely hidden away somewhere on the second deck, while this Clark girl had been locked into a stateroom above. I possessed such a growth of beard, and was altogether so disreputable looking, as to be mistaken for a roustabout by the boat's officers, who set me at work to earn my passage. In this way I managed to talk with Elsie, but failed to locate your quarters. The only glimpse I gained of you was when you were being taken ashore. Then I followed, and a little later succeeded in getting you out of Kirby's hands. That is about all."

"Oh, no, it is not—you—you came too late."

"Too late! Perhaps I may know what you mean."

"Do you? Surely not to blame me! I—I wish to tell you, Lieutenant Knox; but—but I scarcely know how. It is all so dim, indistinct in my own mind—and yet I remember. I am trying so hard to recall how it all happened, but nothing remains clear in my mind. Have I been drugged?"

"Without question. We have been riding all night, and you were strapped to your horse. Probably you have no recollection of this?"

She shook her head in bewilderment, gazing about as though noting the strange surroundings for the first time.

"No; the last I remember I was with Kirby, and another man. He—he was dressed like a minister, but—but he was half drunk, and once he swore at me. The place where we were was a little shack in the side of a hill, with stone walls. Kirby took me there from the steamer, together with a man he called Rale—Jack Rale. They locked me in, and left me alone until after dark. Then this other man, who dressed like a minister, came back with Kirby. They had food, and something to drink with them; and lit a lamp, so that we could see. It was awfully dismal, and dark in there." She pressed her hands to her head despairingly. "I can remember all this, but later it is not so clear; it fades out, like a dream."

"Try to tell me all you can," I urged. "They fed you?"

"Yes, I managed to eat a little, but I would not drink. They both became angry then, and frightened me; but they did compel me to swallow some of the stuff. Then I became dazed, and partially helpless. Oh, I cannot tell you; I do not really know myself—it seemed as though I had to do just what they told me; I had no will of my own, no power of resistance."

"You were married to Kirby."

"Oh, God!—was I? I wondered; I did not really know; truly I did not know. I seem to remember that I stood up, and then signed some paper; but nothing had any meaning to me. Is that true? Do you know that it is true?"

I grasped her hand, and held it closely within my own.

"I am afraid it is true," I answered. "I know very little law, but it may be that such a ceremony is not legal—in fact I feel sure it is not. Yet I imagine those men were certain as to what they could do. Kirby had planned to marry you from the very first, as I explained to you before. He told me that on the Warrior, the night your father died."

"Yes, you said so; but I did not quite understand—he planned then—why?"

"Because he had heard of your beauty, and that you were rich. Were these not reasons enough? But, after he had mistaken you for Rene, the only possible way in which he could hope to gain you was by force. Jack Rale suggested that to him, and how it could be done. The other man was a friend of Rale's, a renegade preacher named Gaskins; he is dead."

"Dead! Killed?"

"Yes; we brought you away after a fight with those fellows. We left Rale bound, and Kirby unconscious."

"Unconscious, hurt—but not dead?"

"He had a bad gash in his skull, but was alive."

Kennedy, puffing happily upon a pipe, came loitering about the corner of the hut, and approached us. Eloise staggered to her feet, shrinking back against the wall of the shack, her eyes on his face.

"That man here!" she cried in terror. "That man! Why he was at Beaucaire! He is the one to whom I claimed to be Rene."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WE CHOOSE OUR COURSE.

JIM grinned at me, but did not appear particularly flattered at his reception. "Not quite so fast, young lady," he said, stuttering a bit, and holding the pipe in his hand. "I reckon I wus thar all right, just as ye say; an' thet I did yer a mighty mean turn; but I ain't such a dern ornary cuss as ye think—am I, cap?"

"No, you are not," I hastened to explain. "Miss Beaucaire does not understand, that is all. We have been talking together for some time, but I had forgotten to tell her that you were one of her rescuers.

Kennedy here, merely supposed he was doing his duty, until he learned what Kirby contemplated. Then he refused to have any hand in it, and the two quarreled. Shall I relate that part of the story?"

Her eyes softened, her lips almost smiling.

"Yes," she said. "I am glad to know; tell me all."

I described Tim's part in the whole tragedy swiftly, while he shifted awkwardly from one foot to the other, and occasionally interjected some comment, or correction. He was not wholly at ease in the rôle of hero, nor under the steadfast gaze of her eyes. As I stopped speaking she held out her hand frankly.

"Then I shall count you my friend now," she said simply, "and am so delighted to understand everything. There are four of us here, counting the mulatto girl, and we are in hiding not far from Yellow Banks. You both think that Kirby and Rale must be hunting us, already?"

"Probably; they are very certain not to be far away. I was planning our course when I glanced up, and caught your eyes watching me—"

"And I—I thought I saw a ghost," she interrupted. "And then, when you actually spoke, I—I was so glad."

Tim's eyes fell upon the map lying outspread on the ground.

"An' whut did ye think wus best, cap?" he inquired gravely. "'Tain't likely we got all summer ter sit 'round yere an' talk in. I reckon we done rested 'bout long 'nough. 'Tain't such a bad place, but my notion is we ought ter be joggin' 'long."

"Mine also. Come over here, both of you, and I'll give you my idea. I figured our chances in this way."

In a few words I explained my choice of route, pointing it out on the map, and telling them briefly why I was afraid to seek refuge either at Fort Madison or Fort Armstrong, or, indeed, at any of the nearer settlements. Eloise said nothing, her gaze rising from the map to our faces as we debated the question; for Tim spoke his mind freely, his stubby forefinger tracing the course I had indicated.

"Thar's a trail south o' yere thet leads ter a town called Ottaway; an' thar's another trail north o' yere—Injun, I reckon—whut runs straight east. Whar we are is plumb in atween the two ov 'em, but it looks like it might be gud travelin'. Enyhow, thar ain't no rivers er nuthin', so fer as I see. What's this Ottaway, enyhow?"

"There is a small settlement there and a blockhouse. Possibly there are other settlements between here and there not on the map."

"How fer do yer make it frum this place ter thar?"

"Well, here is probably the stream we waded up last night, see. I should say we must be about where I made this mark. To Ottawa? I will make a guess that it is a bit over a hundred miles, and from there to Chicago, sixty or seventy more. Those last would be over a good trail."

"An' whar do yer reckon are them Injuns—the hostile ones, this yere bunch o' Black Hawks?"

"Somewhere up Rock River or along the Green valley. I'll point it out to you, see; there is where Black Hawk had his village and his hunters ranged all over this country, down as far as the Illinois. Of course, I cannot tell where they are now, for that depends on how far the soldiers have driven them; but it would be my guess they will be somewhere in here—between Prophet's Town and the Winnebago Swamp."

"Let's see; thet ain't so dern fer away, either. I reckon this yere course ye've just picked out wouldn't take us mor'n twenty mile er so away. S'pose we'd run inter a raidin' party o' them Injuns. I ain't got much hair, but I kin use whut I have got."

"I am not sure, Tim, but I would even prefer that to being overtaken by Joe Kirby and the gang he'll probably have with him," I retorted, my gaze on the questioning face of the girl. "However, there is little chance of our encountering such a party. The soldiers are all coming up from the south, and are bound to force Black Hawk's warriors to the other bank of the Rock. There will be nothing but barren country east of here. What do you say, Miss Eloise?"

Her eyes met mine bravely, without a shadow of doubt in them.

"I shall go wherever you say," she replied firmly. "I believe you will know best."

"Then I decide on this route. Once we get beyond the swamp those fellows are going to have a hard task following us, unless they have an Indian trailer along with them. We have been here several hours; the horses must be rested. Let's eat what we can again and then start. We must find a way out of this labyrinth while we have daylight."

Kennedy stood up and stared about us at the desolate scene, the expression of his face proving his dissatisfaction with the prospect.

"O' course I'm a goin' 'long with yer, cap," he acknowledged dryly. "I never wus no quitter, but this yere trip don't look so damned easy ter me, fer all thet. Howsumever, I reckon we'll pull through, sumhow, on fut er hossback. I'll wake up thet Clark gurl now, an' then saddle the hosses."

I watched him round the corner of the cabin, not wholly at ease in my own mind, then gathered up the map and replaced it in my pocket, aware that Eloise had not moved from her position on the grass.

"Is he right?" she questioned, looking up at me. "Is there any real danger of Indians?"

"Some, perhaps; it is all Indian country north and east of here, or has been. I am not denying that, but this danger does not compare in my mind with the peril which confronts us in every other direction. I am trying to choose the least. Our greatest difficulty will be the lack of food—we possess no guns with which to kill game, only pistols, and an exceedingly small stock of ammunition. That is what troubles Tim—that and his eagerness to get back down the river. He fails to realize what it would mean to you to fall again into Kirby's hands."

"Do you realize?"

"Do I? It is the one memory which controls me. Tell me; am I not right? No, not about the route, but about the man. You despise the fellow? You are willing to face any hardship so you may escape him?"

"I would rather die than have him touch me. I never knew the meaning of hate before. Surely you cannot deem it possible that I could ever forgive?"

"No, that would be hard to conceive; and yet I wished to hear the words from your own lips. Will you answer me one thing more? Why did you first assume the character of Rene? And why did you repose such instant trust in me?"

She smiled rather wistfully, her long lashes concealing her eyes.

"I think I hardly knew myself," she admitted timidly. "It all happened, was born of impulse, rather than through any plan. Perhaps it was just the woman in me. After my father died Delia thought it best to tell us the story of Rene's birth. This—this was such a terrible tale; and later we sought all through his private papers hoping he had taken some action to set those two free. There was no proof that he had, no mention indeed, except a memorandum of intention to refer the matter to Lawyer Haines at the Landing. This merely served to confirm what Delia had told us and, as Haines had gone to St. Louis, we were unable to see him.

"We were all of us nearly crazed; I was even afraid Rene would throw herself into the river. So I suggested that we run away, and drew money out of my private account for that purpose. My only thought was to take a steamer up the Ohio to some place where we were not known and begin life over again. Rene had been a sister to me always; we were playmates from childhood, and I had grown up loving and trusting Delia ever since I was a baby. No sacrifice was too great to prevent their being sold into slavery. Oh, you cannot understand; I had no mind left; only a blind impulse to save them."

I caught her hand in mine and held it firmly.

"Perhaps I do understand. It was my knowledge of this very condition which first brought me to you."

"You heard about us on the boat—the Warrior? Did father tell you?"

"No, it was Kirby. He was actually proud of what he had done—boasted to me of his success. I have never known a man

so heartlessly conceited. Eloise, listen. You may have thought this was largely an accident. It was not; it was a deliberately planned, cold-blooded plot. I tell you that Joe Kirby is of the devil's own breed; he is not human. Rene's father told him first of the peculiar conditions at Beaucaire."

"Rene's father! Does—does he still live?"

"No; but he did live for years after he disappeared, supporting himself by gambling on the lower river. At one time he and Kirby were together. After he died Kirby investigated his story in St. Louis and found that it was true. Then he laid this plot to gain control of everything, including both of you girls—a plot surely hatched in hell."

"You know this to be true? How?"

"Partly, as I have said, from Kirby's own lips. In addition, Jack Rale added what he knew—they are birds of a feather."

"But it seems so impossible, so like fiction. How could the man hope to succeed to consummate such a crime? Besides, why should he desire us, Rene and I, whom he had never seen?"

"It can only be explained when you know the man. He had heard you described as beautiful women; that was enough for his type. He had convinced himself that Rene was a slave—his slave, once he had successively played his trick. He knew you to be an heiress, with a sum of money in your own right, which he could only hope to touch through marriage. The man dreamed of owning Beaucaire, of possessing all it contained. He was willing to risk everything to carry out his hell-born scheme, and to ruin every one who interfered with him. I am telling you all this, Eloise, because it is now time you should know. Will you not tell me just how it all came to you?"

Her hands clung to me, as though she dare not let go; her eyes were filled with a mingling of wonderment and pain.

"Why, of course. We thought it best not to go until after we could see the lawyer. I could not believe my father had neglected to set those two free—he—he loved them both. Delia and Rene had gone down to the Landing that night to see if he had returned. We were both of us afraid to leave Rene alone, she was so despondent, so unstrung. It was dark, and I was all alone in the house. Then these men came. They did not know me, and I did not know them, but I was sure what they came for. I was terribly frightened, without an idea what to do, only I refused to talk. All I could do was to pray that the others might be warned and not return. They searched the house and then left this man Tim to guard me. He told me he was a deputy sheriff from St. Louis, and—and I encouraged him to explain all he knew about the case. Then I made up my mind what to do—I would pretend to be Rene and let them carry me off instead of her."

"But did you not realize the danger to yourself?"

"No, I suppose I didn't; or, rather, I did not care. All I thought about was how to save her. These were law officers; they would take me to St. Louis before a court. Then I could make myself known and would be set free. They couldn't do anything else, could they? There was no law by which I could be held; but—but don't you see—the delay might give Rene time to escape. That was not wrong, was it?"

"Wrong! It was one of the bravest things I ever heard of. And I know the rest—your encounter with Kirby in the library. I overheard all of that through the open window, and how you learned from him that certain legal papers would have to be served on Eloise Beaucaire before any of the slaves could be touched or removed from the estate. That knowledge only brought you new courage to play out your part. But why did you trust me enough to go with me? And, after trusting me so fully, why did you refuse to tell me who you really were?"

Her eyes fell before mine and her cheeks were flushed.

"I—I do not believe I can tell you that, lieutenant. You—you see, I am not even sure I know. At first, there in the library, I was compelled to choose instantly between you, and—and something infinitely worse. I—I supposed that man Kirby was dead; that—that you had killed him to save me. I—I looked into your face, and—and it

was a man's face; you said you were an army officer. I—I had to believe and trust you. There was no other way. Please do not ask me to explain any more."

"I shall not—only just this. If you actually believed in me, trusted me, as you say, why should you still claim to be Rene, and continually remind me there was negro blood in your veins? That you were a negress and a slave?"

"You think that strange? I did trust you, Lieutenant Knox; and I trusted you more completely the longer we were together. But—but I did not wholly understand. You were endeavoring to rescue Rene from slavery. I could not conceive what interest you might feel if I should confess myself Eloise. You were strange to me. We were there alone with the negro and—and somehow it seemed a protection to me to claim a drop of black blood. Twice I thought to tell you—the words were on my lips—but something stopped them. Possibly, just a little, I was afraid of you."

"Then—but not now?"

"No, not now; not even a little. You have proven yourself all I ever hoped you would be. I am glad, so glad, to say to you now I am Eloise Beau—"

She stopped suddenly, the word half-uttered, the smile fading from her lips. She withdrew her hands from my clasp and pressed them over her eyes.

"My God!" she burst forth. "But I am not! I am not! Why I never felt the horribleness of it all before—I am not Eloise Beaucaire!"

A moment I stood motionless, seeming to hold my breath, my eyes upon her, struck silent by the intense bitterness of that cry. Then the reaction came, the knowledge that I must turn her thought elsewhere.

"Do not say that, or even think it," I urged, scarcely able to restrain myself from clasping her in my arms. "Even if it shall prove true, legally true, some way of escape will be found. The others are safe, and you are going to need all your courage. Pledge me to forget this thing--I need you."

Her hands fell nerveless, and her questioning eyes sought my face. They were tearless, unabashed.

"You are right, Lieutenant Knox," she said frankly. "I owe my loyalty now to you. I shall not yield again to despair; you may trust me, my friend."

The day was not yet ended when we finally retraced our way across the narrow dike to the mainland, prepared to resume our journey. The passage was slow and dangerous, and we made it on foot, leading the horses. The woods were already beginning to darken as we forded the north branch of the creek and came forth through a fringe of forest trees into a country of rolling hills and narrow valleys.

The two girls were already mounted, and Tim and I were busily tightening the straps for a night's ride, when, from behind us, back in the direction of the peninsula we had just quitted, there sounded the sharp report of a rifle. We straightened up, startled, and our eyes met. There could be but one conclusion—our pursuers had found the trail.

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK. **Don't forget this magazine is issued weekly, and that you will get the conclusion of this story without waiting a month.**

YOUTH AND AGE

BY CLINTON SCOLLARD

HOW gaily prodigal of life is Youth,
Thoughtless beyond to-day's bright-blazoned page;
But with the shifting of the years, forsooth
How miserly is Age!

The Last Resort

by Clinton Dangerfield

"D'YE want to live, or not?" Granite demanded harshly. He leaned forward in his chair, bringing his coarse, powerful face closer to the prison-pale countenance of Osbourne Tallent, who stood leaning against the steel window-bars.

Tallent's gray eyes burned.

"Did you come here to torment me with useless questions? Do I want to live? God! I'd do anything to live—anything! It isn't till a man gets close to death that he realizes it's something he'd pay any price to escape." He paused a moment, drawing a half-sobbing breath.

Granite's topaz eyes, dashed with green, narrowed, watching closely. His over-large ears were all attention.

"You," the condemned man half sobbed on, throwing out hands which no imprisonment could make other than well shaped and muscular, like his whole well-set figure —"you are boss of your State; you are rich; you eat, drink, and are free. You think you'll live always. You haven't any sense of death. But one day it 'll stare you in the face. Then you'll be ready to offer all you have for just—breath."

"That's the way you feel, is it? Good! Now, listen. I never come here for useless talk. You know my son, my only child, Rupert, was murdered on his twenty-first birthday by Kent Hallock."

Tallent made an involuntary movement; his eyes rested anxiously but hopefully on Granite.

"The jury acquitted him."

"I know they did; damn them! Because it was circumstantial evidence. Juries are getting so mushy about circumstantial evidence, it's no longer any good, though the proof is plain as daylight. Hallock's loose, all right; baching in the mountains, prospecting for coal he'll never find; because *I* am going to square accounts with him—through you."

The prisoner stared mutely; his anxious, handsome face, his dark, gray eyes were filled with moveless perplexity, as though he did not know whether he dared expect anything of moment to himself.

Granite leaned a little farther forward; his wide, coarse lips writhed around his words.

"You called me the boss of this State. I am. The Governor lives in my palm. If you'll join forces with me, I'll get a respite of thirty days for you—you who are scheduled to die to-morrow."

"A—respite. Is that—all?"

"No, it ain't. You'll be let escape. I'll see to that. The warden's mine; has been for three years. You'll be given money; anything you need. Into the hills you'll go, and find the devil who killed my boy. First chance you get, you'll square my ac-

count for me. Then you'll come back and tell me Hallock is dead—and then—"

"Then—"

"You'll find a pardon waiting you. Ask any man living if I ever broke my word to them that serve me. Only a fool makes promises an' don't keep 'em. Not only a pardon, but fifty thousand dollars of your own. Life, freedom, money to help enjoy those two—what say?"

Silence. In the gray gloom of the bare-walled cell, the steel window-bars threw menacing shadows on the floor.

Granite, chewing the end of a fifty-cent cigar, waited patiently, his hard eyes fixed composedly on the prisoner's hands, now tensely locked together; on the prisoner's white, strained face.

Tallent tried to speak, quivering from head to foot.

"I—I—" he gasped, and could say no more.

Leisurely Granite took the cigar from his lavishly gold-filled teeth.

"You was innocent, Tallent."

"I was—I was! I am! I was drunk—so Dabney and his bunch had a cinch swearing Dabney's crime off on me. God! that I ever should have been fool enough, insane enough, to drink myself into a state where I was at anybody's mercy."

"You never was a drinker," Granite offered soothingly. "Maybe that time was your first drunk."

"I'd been on two sprees before. I took it as just fun—I had no liquor craving. Fun—and the choice you're offering me now."

"You gotter right to live," Granite insisted slowly, forcefully. "You got *every* right to live; but he—he ain't got one."

Tallent's hands fell apart. His right closed round one of the steel window-bars. His gray orbs hardened until the glint in them was as cruel as that in Granite's.

"I'll take you up. I've got a right to live."

In the tablelands of the Blue Ridge the winters vary from severity which exhausts the squirrels' stores, to those milder years in which the gray-coated nut-gatherers find life a perpetual picnic, and in which small flowers rashly bloom out under drifted brown leaves, thinking surely spring has come.

For such a winter Kent Hallock was thankful. He could go steadily on with his pick-and-shovel drive into the coal hill on the land he was prospecting. Then, too, the milder weather made matters easier for his sister, Frances. She kept house for him in the little "frame house" he had put up; merely a skeleton, planked outside and shingled above.

The shadow of her brother's past peril still imaged itself in the dreams of Frances Hallock; she still woke shuddering from visions of the bygone trial, and, waking, drank in avidly the conscious fact that Kent was safe.

As her brother came and went, a wide-shouldered, tall, grave man whose clean-shaved, plain, strong face was still grim from his recent court experiences, Frances felt a recurrent thrill of deep joy that all had ended so well.

She resented her dreams of the trial. To-day, in her steady happiness, she felt that she must have outgrown them through sheer satisfaction in life. She was peeling potatoes for the noon dinner. As the brown spirals ran through her white fingers from her deft knife's guidance, she smiled to herself over Lige Papworth, who was starting a fire for her in the little cook stove.

Kindly, lazy, and exasperating, a mixture of shrewdness and simple incompetence, Lige took his time about the fire, leisurely applying a lighted match to the rich pine splinters he had piled in the fire chamber. As they began to catch he drawled:

"Mr. Hallock, he seems powerful taken with that there new assistant of his—that there John Smith. Myself, I don't keer about that Smith. I kain't exzactly say why."

"Put the top on, Lige. You're letting the pine smoke all over the room."

"Torrectly I'll put hit on, torrectly. But now that there Smith—I kain't say why he makes me oneasy."

"Absurd," Frances interrupted angrily. "Mr. Smith is all right." She was pro-

voked to find herself blushing over his defense. Papworth's small, raccoonlike eyes caught the blush.

"He's a mighty good-*lookin'* feller. But looks only serves to scatterate jedgment. You got to git *under* a man's looks. Now this feller Smith, fer all he's working hard on the cut, he gives me the feelin' I git when I'm alone in the woods an', 'way off summ'er's, I hear a painter callin'—callin'—and shadders gits thick—and somp'n might—"

"Stop talking of panthers and put that top on!" Frances cried, starting up, annoyed with the smoke and the suggestion about the assistant.

Papworth hastily seized the stove key and arranged the top.

"You air so suddent," he accused. Aggrieved, he slouched out into the yard, sat down on the woodpile, took up the ax, and rubbed the handle, while he drifted into a long, cloudy meditation as to whether he should or should not cut some wood.

Frances went happily about getting the dinner. Her serious, lovely face, just irregular enough in feature to make it doubly interesting, was illumined with a sweet intelligence of glance from eyes deep blue and tender. On the nape of her smooth neck her thick, silky brown hair was knotted and held in place by a single shell pin thrust through the knot. A tendril of escaped hair evaded the pin and rested on the white collar of her dark-blue gingham dress. The uprolled sleeves of the dress revealed smooth arms, with the unusual gift of dimples in the rounded elbows.

As she moved about her work she carried herself with gentle dignity; perhaps with a slightly graver poise of movement than would have marked her before she and Kent had known the borders of incalculable tragedy.

Swiftly her white fingers set about biscuit-making. The flour grew into dough; as she kneaded its rich plasticity, her thoughts turned on the new assistant. Added tenderness came into her fair face.

In the loneliness of their mountain life the coming of Tallent, under the commonplace name he had chosen, had stirred in the girl the shy, mysterious powers of an inner self she scarcely knew. His unfailing courtesy, his tired, handsome, brooding face, his strange aloofness broken by hours in which he seemed to push that aloofness quite aside, attracted and held her interest dominantly.

He had been with them three weeks now. All she knew of him was his elemental tale that he "was a college man out of work and ready to take up anything." Hallock's assistant, a gaunt mountaineer, had just "quit," and Kent was glad enough to hire this opportune John Smith, whose athletic body and quick, alert intelligence made him efficient at once. One grave fault the new man had. He resented orders, showing this by frequent complaints of the way in which Hallock spoke to him. At the fifth complaint in one day Hallock stopped in the outside drive they were making into the hill and said slowly:

"What the devil's eating you, Smith? Nobody ever complained before of my way of speaking. Men at work can't stop to be Gaston and Alphonse in politeness. Forget it! You make me think, all the time, you are trying to pick a quarrel with me."

Tallent had stopped work, also. Unreplying, he leaned against the tunnel-bank and moodily stared at Hallock. At last he muttered through dry lips:

"I don't like you—since you want to know."

"Then why don't you quit?"

"I need—money."

"There are times when you seem to like me, Smith."

"That's when I don't remember."

"Don't remember what?"

"That you killed young Granite."

Hallock flushed scarlet. He fixed angry, brown eyes on his assistant's moody face.

"You don't seem to know I was acquitted?"

"Acquittal or non-acquittal in law is merely a gamble. It has nothing to do with—innocence."

"I've a notion to fire you here and now," Hallock retorted hotly.

Tallent sneered faintly.

"Your notion won't hold! You're bending every muscle to prove this property

before your option expires. Every day counts with you. I'm the only first-class worker you can get at the wages you are paying. So you won't fire me, though you'd like to. We don't do what we like. In life men do—what they must."

Hallock stared, frowned; then said dryly:

"I hear the dinner-horn. Come on."

"You go on. I'll follow."

"I hope you'll leave your grouch in the cut," Kent said sharply and strode off, vanishing through the forest.

Left to himself, Tallent stood motionless. Then he thrust out clutching fingers, tore a tuft of dead grass from the upper bank, and stood, crushing the sedge roots in his hands.

"I've got to wait till she's gone. I couldn't do it while she is here. If she goes in the valley Thursday—then—"

In the dark chaos of his thoughts he took no heed of time, or of the meal smoking vainly for him on the rude shack table.

The last of the sedge roots had passed into powder between his convulsive fingers when a voice, rich, shy, yet delicately teasing and provocative, interrupted him.

"We can live without love, what is loving but pining?
But where is the man who can live without—dining?"

As Frances Hallock passed into the cut, she added smilingly: "Or have you attained such a degree of beatitude you can live minus eating?"

He lifted his hat with the well-bred grace that characterized everything he did.

"We can't get away from that word—any time," he said moodily.

"What word?"

"Live."

She stood idly by the cut's bank, regarding him seriously; troubled and puzzled by the alien look in his gray eyes.

"Why should we want to get away from the word? Isn't it the biggest one we have?"

His eyes bent fixedly, searchingly on hers.

"Is it?"

Something in his strange gaze halted her. She amended: "No, it isn't the biggest. Honor, self-sacrifice, pity — life is often subordinated to those."

He sneered in her seriously lovely face.

"Yes; by emotional fools who haven't had time to think. All the highfalutin' acts of life are done under emotional, irrational drives—akin to hysteria. But when a man has had time to think—to know—"

The chain of his words snapped. The alien look in his eyes changed to torment, to agony. He threw his hands, still dusty from the crushed sedge roots, out with a passionate gesture of protest that confused and startled her.

"I want it all!" he cried desperately. "I want life, love, enjoyment. It's my birthright. Haven't I a just title to it, same as any other man? Honor, self-sacrifice, pity—big words, very big! But what are they to a man six feet under ground?"

His hands dropped at his side. Leaning against the cut-bank, he stared at her. In her beautiful face her initial shyness vanished; a radiation of lovely sympathy lighted her deep eyes. She moved a step toward him.

"Why—you are in trouble!"

"Trouble enough. I'm in love with you."

She recoiled the step she had taken; but the words, evidently, weren't displeasing. She flushed; through the flush a smile stole, faintly provocative.

"Why is that so — dreadful?" Then, with swift coldness: "You aren't — married?"

"No."

"Then—what's—wrong?"

He made no answer. His eyes no longer met hers, but turned away and stared into the winter woods. She persisted this time, advancing quite near him.

"Won't you please tell me why you—you shouldn't love—me?"

His gaze flashed back to hers, then fell. Bravely she persisted:

"It's—it's quite dreadful, perhaps, to insist. But—but we have grown to be—to be real friends. Your — your coming here has brought new life to me. I—"

"Don't! That's enough."

She gathered her courage in both hands and answered him:

"No—it's not enough. Here—in the woods—people learn to talk truthfully. I—since you've said it—that you love me—I—"

"Don't!"

Quietly she ignored the interpolation.

"You needn't be afraid to say you love. I've—I've given you mine in return."

Again his eyes sought hers, rested hungrily on her. He sprang toward her, caught up her hands, and crushed them against his chest, marking her white wrists with the coal shale that blackened his own fingers.

"You were made for me, Frances; made for me. Both of us suited to the other. Built for happiness. Built for life. Just for this moment—this once—give me a single kiss, and let me forget in it for one instant—"

Her face lifted itself to his as simply as a flower offering, in some gentle garden, its upturned sweetness. Bending, he set his lips on hers with a passion blended of despair and incalculable longing. Then roughly he pushed her from him; and while this, her first kiss still thrilled on her soft mouth, he said harshly:

"Now we are done with that. For always. So I'll tell you the truth—"

"Oh, listen! If it is disease, can't it be conquered? I would help you to get well."

"I am well. From the crown of my wretched head to the soles of my feet, I am strong and clean."

"Then — if it's — something wicked you've done— Oh, dear, I could help you there, too! Because through being sorry one gets clean-souled, too. And I would—"

"I have done nothing wicked. I'm no saint. Mentally, physically, I'm—decent. Yet—I'm—"

"Poor? Oh, my dear, I am not afraid of poverty."

"Who would be afraid of it? Poverty! The man who complains of it is a puling, whining coward. Hasn't he life? What more does he want?"

"Not poverty? What else than the things we have named could separate us?"

Again he leaned back against the bank, folding his arms and staring at her with eyes grown alien, cold, and hard.

"This separates us—Fate has put a skeleton between us. That's the truth. That's all I can tell you. I'd give anything never to have seen you. You've softened me, and I will *not* be soft. You've made me play with words like pity and self-sacrifice; but you *cannot* affect me through them. All that I have, all that I am, is at stake. You've done harm. It was beastly enough—without this—complication. If you've any of that pity, that mercy, you spoke of, keep away from me. Let me alone! You said you were going in the valley. Why don't you go?"

Bewildered, confused, troubled, hurt, deeply perplexed, she turned from the cut and walked back toward the dinner with which she had tried to tempt him. As she walked, tears came; she winked them back on brave lashes, whispering to herself:

"I shall go in the valley to-morrow. Perhaps if he misses me a little while—why, there *can't* be anything really wrong. All the things that separate people — we counted over." A smile broke under the tears. "Why, it's just some kind of foolishness. Things will come right between us. He loves me."

From the cut Tallent looked after her disappearing figure. He drew a hand across his eyes as if to brush away some obscuring thing. His lips moved dryly:

"I can't turn fool now. He's guilty. He must be guilty. And the world's full of women. It's just the loneliness here made me idiot enough to— She's the kind that gets next you before you know it. But she'll get over it. Oh—God—God—God—"

His words ran into convulsive incoherence. His face lay hidden on the bank. But when he lifted his head again his gaze was cool, cruel, determined.

Miles from Kent Hallock's prospecting, very many miles, the Governor sat in gubernatorial state, meditating on the beautiful intricacies of politics, and on the dubious satisfaction of sitting in apparent power.

That the boss of his State had put the Governor in his present high eminence, that

official bitterly acknowledged to himself. But the matter did not extend from acknowledgment to gratitude. On the contrary, the Governor held toward his inestimable friend Granite a feeling of the liveliest hate. This last demand on him—a pardon for Tallent—had been made in such a supercilious, arbitrary way that the Governor raged over the meekness with which he had subscribed to Granite's demand. He had not only given the promise of the pardon, but he would have to keep that promise. Unless—

And if he kept this promise, how many other similar demands would follow? More than he had gratified already, the Governor felt sure. They would have to be granted. Not only because the Governor's graceful, tactful personality utterly lacked the strength of will needed to measure against Granite's iron determination; but also because Granite held up his sleeve certain trump cards of information which would ruin Governor Gorley with a nicety Gorley shivered to reflect on—if Granite were angered into using them.

Whichever way the brooding Governor looked he saw visionary concepts of Granite.

Unless—

When Frances rode away next morning she headed for the nearest valley store to make a few simple purchases. She rode one of the two scraggy mountain ponies she and Kent kept in a tiny frame stable.

On duty as cook she left Papworth. Hallock and John Smith were gone to their work. Osbourne Tallent had held her stirrup, had said good-by to her as coolly, apparently as indifferently, as though they had met half an hour ago.

The resolved coldness of his manner perplexed more than it hurt her. He loved her; he was clean and well; he was guiltless of any crime. Things absolutely must be all right some day soon.

Down the mountain trail she rode alone, half troubled, half happy, in the remembrance of that straightforward "I'm in love with you."

Papworth, left behind, looked after her guiltily. He had promised to fill the rôle of cook, and he meant to occupy himself quite otherwise. He had only promised with a view to extracting two dollars from Frances.

As soon as she was safely beyond any danger of returning, Papworth set forth for the cut. As he walked he drew out a bit of broken mirror and studied his hairy countenance, screwing it this way and that into what he thought an effective mask of distress.

Arrived at the cut, he pocketed the bit of mirror and with a movingly dejected visage stalked into the cut where both men were working with rapid, practised efficiency.

Papworth inwardly thanked God he was not as they—hard workers. Through all his shambling body he loathed work. He whined:

"Mr. Hallock!"

Both men stopped abruptly, wheeled, and stared at him, not having heard his approach. In Osbourne Tallent's eyes was relief; he could do nothing until Papworth was gone. Kent snapped:

"What the dickens do you want, Papworth? You ought to have dinner on."

"Mr. Hallock, I kain't do no cookin' to-day. I jest got word by Sam Innis that my mother-in-law is at the p'int of death."

"Again?"

At the skepticism in Kent's tone Papworth took deep offense.

"No, sur, not agin, but now. The last time hit wasn't my mother-in-law. You air thinkin' about my po' sister Saidy Ann. Looks like the wimmen folks of my fam'ly don't enjoy nothin' but po' health. I'm 'bleeged to go. I reckon Mr. Smith better go git dinner. He done said he learned to cook campin' in some of them furren countries. I reckon he'll git you up a powerful good meal."

Kent glared at his recalcitrant cook. Then he turned a dubious gaze on his assistant. To his surprise the latter said coldly:

"All right. I'll get dinner."

"Thanks, awfully," Kent said cordially. "I'm hungry now, and my cookin' is a nightmare. I'll be along by twelve."

Tallent nodded indifferently. Throwing

down his mining pick, he strode out of the tunnel and went rapidly toward the house. Papworth, approvingly gazing after him, said between manipulations of a huge bite of tobacco just taken:

"That was reel perlite of him. I wasn't exzactly sure he'd be obleegin'."

"He's a surly, sore-headed bear," Kent snapped, annoyed by a morning in which he had felt constant, inexplicable tension between himself and his assistant. "I hope he gets a decent lunch."

In Frances Hallock's crude little kitchen Tallent set about his task. He had accepted the interruption eagerly; first because he shrank from laying hands on Kent in the cut where they had worked so often together; secondly because he was glad of an excuse for deferring, during an hour or two at least, the execution of his, for him, life-bearing promise.

As Tallent set rapidly and by no means incompetently about his dinner-getting, he tried resolutely to push aside his feelings that the little kitchen spoke eloquently of Frances.

To a certain extent he succeeded. For what was the use of weak thoughts concerning her? The thing ahead of him had to be done; he was to become an instrument of justice on a guilty man that he, the innocent man, might go free.

Bread in the oven, potatoes boiling on the stove, meat in the frying-pan, and coffee boiling in its pot soon attested his feverish industry. He crossed to a rude cupboard in search of black pepper for the meat. As he opened the cupboard, a long, blue coverall apron, worn once, but fresh and clean, hanging in pretty housewifely folds from the cupboard door, brushed his cheek. Faintly it breathed against him the fragrance of the orris root Frances loved.

The touch of the simple garment, the fragrance of it, suddenly unmanned him. He caught the folds to him and kissed them again and again; then fled from the door in time to meet the cool, cynical stare of a long, inquiring, estimating, merciless face. Tallent caught his breath, flushed, whitened, stammered:

"Y-you, Coldways?"

"Yes, me. Granite sent me. I dunno what that foolishness over that apron meant, Tallent; but if you're sweet on the sister, you're the biggest fool I ever saw. You've got your work laid out for you. Why don't you do it? You can't suppose Granite trusted to your word entirely? You're watched. Whenever he sets a man to do anything, he puts three others to report on him.

"You see I'm here in mountain clothes. These mountaineers think I'm one of 'em. I can talk their jargon to a finish. And I'm a deputy, armed. It's my business to get you if you go back on your word.

"It's all right for me to shoot an escaped criminal—you would have 'resisted arrest,' you know. And you'd be tumbled into the ground here and left to rot. And the Governor would be glad of your bein' gone; he doesn't want to pardon you; he's gettin' to hate Granite.

"The Governor thinks pardonin' you is bad policy. But he's gotter do it, 'count of the thumbscrews Granite's got in his pocket. That pardon—think what it means to you, Tallent—and don't act the lunatic."

Before Osbourne Tallent could answer, his adviser was gone: gone with the quiet celerity that always distinguished Coldways as one of Granite's most valuable men.

Tallent knew that Coldways's knowledge of the matter in hand would in no way endanger Tallent himself, should Tallent carry out the promise given Granite. Coldways was an ex-gunman, not so very ex, either.

That his master should desire the extinction of Kent Hallock through Osbourne Tallent was simply a "business secret" to the adroit Coldways, whose early and efficient training in the worst New York district had given him an utter indifference to retaliatory crime. There was no reason to suppose Coldways would ever feel the slightest desire to do anything but applaud the extinction of Kent Hallock.

Hallock himself was finding the thought of dinner very interesting. A slight headache had spoiled his breakfast appetite. Now the headache was gone, and Hallock, as he put his tools together near noon and started for the shack, abandoned himself,

with the zest of a five-year-old, to thinking how good the anticipated meal would taste.

Every nerve in his healthy, hard-worked body was calling for food as he entered the shack. Naturally fastidious about his eating, the dainty cooking of Frances had increased the trait.

So when the nostrils of Kent were assaulted by a vile, disconcerting odor of scorching food, he stopped in mingled disgust and anger to stare wrathfully at his assistant, who, giving him a sullen glance, went on placing plates, knives, and forks on the rough table.

"What's that burning?" rasped the indignant employer.

"Everything's burned but the coffee," retorted Tallent, dropping a fork on a plate, where it struck janglingly.

"What the devil—"

"I got to thinking. I forgot the whole mess."

"You got to *thinking!*" The prospect of dinner on nothing but coffee waxed larger and larger and more offensive in the hungry man's vision. "You've got nothing in your head to think with!"

Kent made a dive for the oven, jerked open the door, seized a dish-towel, grabbed the baking-pan from the oven, reached the table in two strides, and flung the pan down on it. This action jumbled together a dozen large biscuits which the fierce oven heat had half charred. The smoke of them reeked to heaven like enraging incense to some impish little god of culinary destruction.

Kent choked out, in a wrath he felt to be more than righteous:

"Damn it—look there!"

Tallent dropped the coffee-cups he had just taken from the cupboard. In his gray eyes a flame of evil brilliancy sprang up. Every couchant devil in him rushed joyously to meet Kent's anger.

"Swearing at me, are you? Think I'm your dog, I suppose."

Striding to the table, Tallent jerked open its side drawer, snatched out two knives, and flung them among the scorched biscuits. These were not table knives; they were mountain dirks, double-edged, running to a single point, and well shafted.

Tallent leaned over the table, his voice crossed it like the lunge of a rapier:

"I've had enough of you—of you and your cursing. The mountain's not big enough for the two of us. I ought to have shot you down long ago; but I'm a fool about it—I couldn't. I want to remember that I fought fair. I can afford to, because I've a hunch things will come my way. I bought those knives from one of the men up here— they are exactly alike. Over yonder in the cupboard is my automatic. Get to it—if you can. The first man who reaches it can put the other—where he wants him. But you'll never reach it—I'll see to that."

As Tallent's words rushed at him, the anger of Kent died in a horror that he should have let so small a thing as a scorched meal precipitate a catastrophe just when his own interests and those of Frances's patently demanded common sense and self-control.

Experienced in men, he did not underestimate the fury in Tallent's eyes. He knew it the more dangerous for the element of cold determination that ran through Tallent's voice. Kent felt all overtures hopeless; yet made them:

"Stop, man—let's talk this over. I'm sorry that I—"

"Take up your knife or you'll be sorrier. I'm coming."

Kent snatched from the burned biscuits the now slightly warmed dirk. As he did so Tallent, impatient to use the rage he so much needed in the task before him, seized on the table edge and flung the obstruction over and aside, leaving a clear way between himself and his employer. Then, crouching slightly, he made a rush for Kent.

Never more peacefully, never more kindly, had a winter sun streamed in through an open door than the rays falling golden on the unplaned plank floor of the shack over which Tallent and Hallock now began a duel which Hallock, sickening at the thought, recognized could end only in death for one, perhaps for both. Not that he fought less well for the recognition. The instinct for life might permit other thoughts; but it subordinated them all.

The sun-rays danced on the knife-blades, scintillated. And ten miles away, in the quiet little valley, they scintillated and danced, too, on the sides of the discarded tin cans thrown in disorderly ugliness around the advertisement-plastered store of J. Higgins. They lighted this excellent emporium and touched warmly the small, white fingers of Frances as she played with two bolts of ribbon, trying to decide between exceptionally appealing shades.

By all the laws of dramatic fiction, she should have known that the two men who meant her whole world were striking, thrusting, parrying, giving and taking cuts which, though as yet slight, had already marked the plank floor with scarlet. Some telepathic wave, some delicately mysterious premonition should have sent her scurrying to horse—except that in real life these convenient warnings are exceedingly scarce. None came to the girl buying ribbon for her silken, abundant hair.

Pleasantly she let one rich ribbon-strand after another pass through her lingering fingers. With satisfaction, J. Higgins, large, benevolently fat, watched over his glasses the charming picture she made.

She felt she had plenty of time.

But with the two men she loved, time had narrowed down to a matter of moments. Each in his shirt-sleeves and trousers, shod with soft elkskin shoes, untrammeled, they receded or advanced as the swift, vicious duel rushed toward its inevitable end.

Already it had prolonged itself surprisingly; already the heart of each throbbed and pounded with arterial pressure; the breath of both came sobbingly; the whites of their burning eyes were no longer clear, but tinged with faintly bloodshot veins.

Tallent's shirt had been ripped from his shoulder by a deflected slash of Kent's knife. The cloth hung in stained folds from Tallent's chest. Of the two, Tallent's hurts were gravest; but Fortune was at his elbow. For the blades, which seemed alike, had this unseen, unknown difference: that of Hallock had an invisible flaw in the steel. And now, as it clashed with Tallent's, the flaw shivered at the contact point, Kent's blade snapped like a pipe-stem; he recoiled, with only the shaft in his convulsive hand.

There was a second's pause.

On the stove the forgotten frying-pan, filled with meat, sent up a cloudy protest of acrid smoke, of which the two men, gasping for breath, were unaware. They had lost all sensation except in regard to those rushing happenings which related to life or death.

In that slight pause Kent's disarmed right hand fell to his side; his glance sped to the cupboard. But Tallent was nearer; he caught the look. With a hoarse cry of triumph, waving his knife, he sprang for the cupboard door, tore from the open shelf the automatic, and faced Hallock exultantly, calling tempestuously:

"Life's mine now—mine! Damn you—I—"

He lifted the automatic. He felt a surge of approbation of himself that he was to use it instead of the dirk. Hallock might have grabbed the dirk with desperate fingers; might even have saved himself. But now! Now everything was right. Hallock was not even a man. He was a force that threatened Osbourne Tallent's life.

Tallent's finger slid to the trigger. Then, through the acrid smoke, through the fury of his carefully built-up blood-lust, he heard the voice of Kent, calm, steady, untroubled:

"The game's up for me, Smith. I know it. I'm not complaining. But wait just one second, won't you? I want to leave you some business directions."

Had there been one note of pleading in Kent's voice; one faintest hint of tragedy, that moment would have been his last. Tallent was not only blood-drunk, but he was subconsciously aware of the days, the weeks, it had taken to build that drunkenness; he knew it must be used, and at once.

But this calm, steady, everyday voice, this perfectly balanced "Wait one second, won't you? I want to leave you some business directions" arrested through its commonplace reasonableness, and disconcerted Tallent into a pause which he intensely resented. His eye narrowed along the revolver.

"Y-you—" he stammered. "You needn't think—"

"I'm not thinking. I want you to do that. I know I'm done with life. But the option on that coal is in my red envelope in my suit-case. Tell her to get a couple of valley men and race the cut in for fifty feet. Tell her spend the last cent on it. She knows where our money is, in that bag under the hearth. Tell her the coal will run thirty-six inches, with no middle band. Urge her to manage the cut so as to get a week's time. Then tell her to go to Argent & Co. They'll take the land. That leaves her a profit that will keep her comfortably after she pays the purchase price."

Silence. The finger on the trigger pressed a hairbreadth tighter, but not heavily enough to send out the stream of death dependent on its mechanism. A lusty breeze, born in the forest, ran over the sun-goldened threshold, and blew back the acrid smoke from the stove. It drifted heavily through the open window.

In the cleared atmosphere Tallent's narrowed gaze sped relentlessly along the pistol-barrel.

He felt that decency required an answer, a consenting answer, to that steady-voiced string of business directions. He knew he would say yes, and it seemed strange to him that he did not answer Hallock at once, and then finish the matter in hand.

Kent had recovered the breath lost in their recent, and for him disastrous tussle. He was breathing very quietly; his face, unscratched by the knives, had a stern composure, unweakened by any useless touch of appeal. He was speaking again now, the same steady, calm inflections marked his words:

"I wish you'd shoot for my heart, Smith. I don't want my face messed up—on account of Frances, you know."

Again it seemed to Tallent he must certainly say yes; again it appeared peculiar to him, in himself, that he did not hear his own voice vouchsafing the monosyllable.

Really he must make an effort and say it audibly. For Hallock might as well know he would have his desire complied with. There was no sense in just thinking the yes. He must say it to Kent. For, after all, this Kent was the man he had sweated and labored with; the man he had eaten and drunk with; the man he had slept beside—

A touch of his first apparent anxiety showed itself in Hallock's face. He said nervously:

"It's quite as easy as shooting higher up. See now—"

With a strong, quick movement he tore the shirt-cloth away from his left breast. The white target offered by the unveiled spot shone in blond contrast to the dark tan of his toil-hardened hands and his sunburned neck and face. The action was undramatic; practical. All Hallock's wealth of life had narrowed now to this, that he might hope for nothing more than that his senseless face should seem unrepulsive. He did not underestimate the deadly accuracy of his assistant's shooting. He had seen it demonstrated as an amusement for idle hours. He added, with the same touch of nervous anxiety in his hitherto steady voice:

"The way you're sighting now—you'll get me directly between the eyes. And I don't want—"

He broke off. The repetition of Frances's beloved name seemed futile. Under this continued strain of seconds, his sustaining man's pride and courage now felt the assault of that flooding terror which in his prison-cell had once unmanned him in the dreary night before he had known whether the jury would say to him guilty or innocent. But before this virulent, stark hate animating his assistant he must not give way. Hallock lifted his head higher, and, looking directly into Osbourne Tallent's eyes, smiled coolly.

The answer set every pride-controlled nerve in his body aquiver; before it he fell back in sheer dumbness.

For the automatic dropped clattering to the floor, where it lay in a tiny pool of scarlet, while Tallent himself fell to one knee beside it, and, covering his face with sheltering hands, gave passionate way to a burst of convulsive sobs, so rending, so despairing, that the man whom he had almost destroyed stood looking down on him in a confusion which left the automatic untouched.

Tallent started up. But still the pistol lay in its red environment. He threw out his hands with that same passionate gesture he had used with Granite and with Frances Hallock.

"It's all been for nothing—for nothing! I can't do it. I should have known I couldn't. Something holds me back. Something—"

Near him Hallock's long, high tool-chest stood against the wall. Tallent dropped on it and sat there, crumpled, his head bent forward, his hands lying as still in his lap as though the law held over him had really been executed.

Coherence came into the confusion of Kent's thoughts. Whatever had brought about the cataclysm of his assistant's hate, the cause was in abeyance just now. Hallock walked quietly to the stove, lifted the scorching frying-pan, pitched it out the window, threw the burned potatoes after it, moved back the coffee-pot. Then he went as quietly to the overthrown table, restored it and several chairs to their former austere uprightness.

This done, he got a pail of water and a broom. Slushing the floor with water, he began patiently trying to dispose of the blood-spots; then suddenly realized both he and his recent antagonist were respotting the floor with trickling scarlet from sundry surface cuts.

With a grim smile Hallock fished out from Frances's household store a small bed-sheet. This he tore into strips and walked over to Tallent.

"Get up! I'll patch you up first, and you can do the same for me. When we're tied up a bit, we'll have bread and coffee. There's some stale bread in the cupboard. It's a darned lot better than nothing."

Dully, obediently, Tallent rose and submitted himself to Hallock's fingers; then, as mechanically, he tended Kent's own cuts. Twenty minutes later the revolver, wiped free of red, was back in the cupboard, and the two men, in clean garb, were sharing the bread and coffee which Hallock had set on the table.

Tallent drank the coffee avidly, the bread he little more than crumbled. When the scant meal was over, he said slowly:

"I don't want to stop you from work—but—I'm going to tell you the whole thing."

"As to stopping me from work—" Hallock made a wry face. "These infernal cuts are work enough for to-day. Go on, let's have some light on your recent lunacy."

"I wish I *were* mad. I—" He took up the tale deliberately, mechanically, thoroughly. When he had finished, the man who had been in the shadow of death and had gotten back his freedom sat staring wordlessly at the man over whom the octopus clutch of the Great Shadow so closely hung. Then:

"You can try for a getaway, Tallent. I'll help you any earthly way I can."

"Oh, I'll try—but Coldways—"

A few days later the Governor sat at his huge, polished desk in the handsomely furnished library balloted into his hands by an approving and well-manipulated public. In years the Governor might have been forty; he was counted in politics a young man. He felt that before him should lie a far more brilliant future—except for the shadow of Granite.

But if he could only rise further through Granite, the very Presidential chair would only mean himself as a special puppet. That he had not the potential qualities for any such rise, Gorley did not know; that he was upheld, sustained, not only by Granite's campaign funds, but also by the boss's shrewd, far-seeing advice, his vanity could not guess.

He swung himself round in his carved spring chair to meet a middle-aged, highly groomed, intellectual-faced man whose card the Governor held in his hand.

"Sit down, Mr. Pullayne. You are Osbourne Tallent's lawyer?"

Pullayne seated himself with a deferential air.

"Yes, Governor. You know that he escaped."

"H-m! Yes. I know."

"Well, he was retaken; by Coldways and two of Coldways's men. Tallent's respite is, as your excellency knows, about

to expire—in fact, is out in an hour. At that time Tallent will pay the last penalty."

"That fellow Coldways is always bringing his men in alive," grumbled his excellency, stabbing a blotter with a paper-knife. "He thinks it's more to his credit, I suppose."

"Well, it is. Shooting a man down is crude work; to take a desperate, hunted creature alive is—artistic. Governor, if you could see this young fellow, you'd feel pity for him. He—"

"Don't begin on that line."

The lawyer drew out a fine square of handkerchief linen, rubbed his thin lips, then said with an added touch of deference:

"No doubt your excellency has given the case all needed thought. I understood from Mr. Granite that you—er—esteemed the law sufficiently mistaken to grant—er—a pardon."

Moodily, resentfully, the Governor eyed Pullayne.

"H-m!"

Pullayne pursued smoothly:

"I understood your excellency would give me the pleasure of delivering to Tallent—"

The Governor interrupted him with an impatient gesture. He looked angrily at the clock. What was Tallent to him? Keenly an irritant, because he stood for a demand by Granite.

And this demand would have to be granted—unless—

Why didn't long distance call? Couldn't he play as well as Granite the involved game of mercilessness which Granite himself had manipulated all his life?

That prolonged silence of the phone made the Governor nervous. Granite had been very emphatic about this pardon. If the Governor's own interpolation in the mechanism of fate should not work out, if Granite returned, to close over his excellency that iron claw Granite called a hand, what might not the boss do?

Distinctly Granite had declared that if he offered no request to the contrary Tallent was to be pardoned. It was not safe to let Tallent die—unless—

And still the telephone kept its own counsel. And still Pullayne waited patiently, with an expressionless face, though secretly the lawyer was considerably puzzled.

The ramifications of Granite's influence included Pullayne. Pullayne even knew why his client had been given a respite, why he was to have been pardoned had Granite's acrid thirst for retaliation been satisfied.

But Tallent had weakened at the last moment. Had, by his own admission to the lawyer, given way to those absurd theories of fair play, of mercy, which Pullayne regarded as hopelessly academic.

That Granite had been duly notified of this failure, that the boss was on his way to order the destruction of the pardon which Pullayne knew lay signed in the Governor's desk under lock and key, the lawyer had full reason to believe. Tallent himself had dully declared the uselessness of approaching the Governor, who was also personally inimical to Tallent through a virulent quarrel with Tallent's dead father.

Exhausted by long mental strain, certain now that Destiny herself had thrown down trump cards against him, Tallent put aside the tormenting pangs of vain hopes, and found, in the dregs of reestablished despair, a kind of weary peace.

He had reached a point where he was too stupefied to think. He hoped nothing now except that the coming hour's dread experience might at least lack the personal torture of pain. He clung to the belief that electricity stuns before it kills, and he sat patiently waiting.

No such patience attended the pitying and sickened Hallock. From keen personal suffering under somewhat similar circumstances, he guessed what Tallent was enduring. Hallock had also the bitter task of upholding Frances, to whom he had told everything, though he had bluntly pointed out the fact that they had no proofs against Granite, only the word of a condemned man.

The lovely and sustaining courage Frances had shown all through Hallock's trial had no duplicate in her behavior now. Realizing she could do nothing, that the outcome could only be the sweeping out of her reach forever of the man whom she

would herself have died to save, she lay in Hallock's arms weeping until she could cry no longer.

The cut had been driven to a successful finish; the deal with Argent & Co. would be closed to-morrow. But for such things there was no place in the consciousness of the torn soul of Frances. To-morrow to her meant only a blank so hideous that the bare thought of it threatened her with oblivion.

They had come to be near Tallent at the last; they had been allowed to say good-by to him.

The story of Tallent's love Pullayne knew; knew also that the brother and sister had quarters near the prison. It was easy for Tallent to confide in his lawyer, because Pullayne had a personal liking for his client, and showed it.

It is one of the mysteries of life that no man, no woman, ever grows so worldly that they are not subject to the inexplicable influences which make us like one human being and violently dislike another. Whatever he could do for Tallent without individual loss or discomfort, Pullayne was really quite ready to do; though he was not going to worry over Tallent's extinction if his client must go the way of all flesh.

In applying for a pardon which he believed practically rescinded, Pullayne had merely taken what he considered a highly doubtful chance. His client had been recaptured in the last hours of the respite, and hurried back to die properly, legally. Pullayne himself, busy at some distance on a family matter of his own, had barely gotten word in time to reach the city an hour before the law should give the final word releasing the current. Hope in the matter seemed folly—yet, if the Governor had not acceded, neither had he refused.

As the two men sat together, Pullayne seemed to see nothing. Yet his side-glancing eyes intercepted every secret look the Governor bestowed on the gold-crusted clock furnished by loyal taxpayers.

Pullayne intuitively came to believe that Gorley was not waiting for the hour of execution, but that his excellency had set a time-limit on certain conditions.

Pullayne became convinced that Gorley's decision rested on a communication from some one, somewhere. Naturally the lawyer believed this communication would come from Granite. In this he was wrong. The message for which the Governor yearned and listened would not come from Granite; though it would indeed relate to the yoke Granite had set on his excellency's shoulders.

Half-past eleven struck. Pullayne rose.

"Your excellency," he said, nervously, "if you grant mercy to this man, I shall barely have time—"

The Governor glared at Pullayne. He looked sullenly from the lawyer to the clock. Slowly, unwillingly, the Governor's fingers unlocked and opened a small drawer, drew from it a signed, sealed pardon for Osbourne Tallent, and put it, ungraciously, into Pullayne's hands.

If Tallent, ready for death, and desperately tolerant of what must be, tasted the deepest bitterness of that cup of terror which the Grim Reaper brews for the bravest, he might almost have loved the draft. Because, with the coming of Pullayne, Tallent, already standing by the scientific engine of extinction, passed from the abysses of the last resignation to a full realization of the restored gift—life.

Life! In that first sweet, dazzling, overwhelming knowledge of its safety, he sought for words, and could not find them. He never found them. But that recognition of life's value was always to give his days ahead a zest and delight which he would never otherwise have known.

To Frances Hallock he came as one risen from the dead. She, too, through agony, knew a finer, deeper thrill in restored happiness than any lesser price could have bought. And to Kent, Tallent's pardon was an intense relief; he had been too intimately in touch with horror himself not to make every generous allowance for the man who had so nearly used him as a shield.

Pullayne beamed on the three of them, and it was Pullayne who that evening, as the trio were planning the future, brought to them a newspaper-heading which gave

the astute lawyer all the key he needed to the recent situation. It ran:

GRANITE KILLED IN AUTO WRECK.

Goes Down on Faulty Bridge. His Companion, Pete Mannering, Well-Known Athlete, Escapes, Though Unconscious for Hours from Blow on Head.

Pullayne dug a comprehending elbow into Tallent's side.

"Get that? He overbossed Gorley. When I asked for that pardon, Gorley was waiting for a message from Mannering about that—*accident*. Mannering's been in the movies. He's the kind that would take any spectacular chance—for enough dough. If Mannering hadn't been knocked silly, his word would have reached Gorley in plenty time to cook your pardon."

"Good God!"

"Good devil—he's the one runs politics. But you're safe enough now. And let's hope our friend Gorley will enjoy having knocked his only step-ladder from under himself. What lay between 'em has cost Mr. Hallock a perfectly good enemy."

Hallock smiled.

"Your news is a genuine relief, I admit."

Pullayne rose. He turned to Frances:

"I understand you are leaving here as—"

Frances raised to him a radiant, though flushed face.

She said simply:

"Yes. As Osbourne's wife."

I LOVE YOU SO!

BY JANE BURR

GO free, my love! Go on your way
Down all the lanes of budding May,
I would not have you droop and stay
If you would go.
I thrill against your sturdy heart,
Your kisses make the roses start;
And yet I'd smile if we should part—
I love you so.

It is so wonder-sweet to kneel
Before you, lover mine, and feel
That all your passion's flame is real—
I love you so!
And still I would not curse and blame,
Nor bow my head in blackest shame,
But keep you holy all the same,
If you should go.

My eyes all worshipful can see
That love enslaved will struggle free—
Go joyously away from me
If you would go;
And though I'd wait forever true,
I ask not that you love me, too;
It is enough that I love you—
I love you so!

Heart to Heart Talks

By the Editor

NEXT week ALL-STORY WEEKLY readers are going to meet a bully out-of-door heroine, a California girl with red hair. She's human all the time, and, under the most trying circumstances, she does just the sort of thing one would want her to do. We refer to *Miss Peggy Wilson,* heroine of

THE SKIRTS OF CHANCE

BY PERRY PRENTISS

a novel which is going to appear in three long instalments.

Of course, there is more than a heroine to this novel—every well-regulated novel needs a hero and a villain. The hero of this story starts life under a cloud, and that cloud gets darker and darker until one can't tell whether he is hero or villain. Only the girl is sure of him. You'll wonder how she *can* believe in him, right up to the end of the story; then you'll find the explanation something unguessed.

It's one of those stories you can't anticipate. In it there is a succession of surprising happenings, each just a little more exciting than the last.

♣ ♣ ♣

IN our very heart of hearts we are all of us lawless, primitive savages, with a lust for the clink of steel on steel, for red wine, high play, and fair and kindly ladies.

Maybe we are upright churchgoers, who disapprove of cards, belong to the Prohibition Party, and have a comfortable wife and several children; but all the same—

Well, there's no harm in *reading* about such things, is there?

And as far as that is concerned, in these days of the abolition of horse-racing, of local option, and the prize-fight that will soon be no more, the rest of us have to be satisfied with reading, no matter how reckless we may feel.

Therefore a good romance with the smiles of fair ladies, the clink and slither of rapier against rapier of a dewy morning, the rattle of dice in a famous coffee-house, and the perennial argument as to the bouquet of this or that vintage, plus the charm of a first-class author, is a romance worth reading.

Such is next week's complete novelette—

ONE GLASS OF WINE!

BY MAX BRAND

Author of "Fate's Honeymoon," "Mr. Cinderella," etc.

It is a tale of the good old days of Queen Anne of England, when London Town was both gay and dangerous, when blood was hot and readily spilled, and a man with

a supple wrist and a stout heart might win to fame, fortune, and a fair lady. And it lacks none of Mr. Brand's almost lyric beauty of form and style. No girl could ever resist a Max Brand lover!

A "DIFFERENT" story is not the sort of manuscript easy for us to find. Plenty of authors are eager to try this type of tale, but seldom has an author more than one really *different* plot in his literary storeroom. Many authors never achieve a different story. They are the sort of work which testifies that there is such a thing as inspiration in literary work; that it is not all perspiration, as many modern critics and teachers would have us think. We have in mind a different story for next week's issue of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY. It is called

AFRAID OF HIS SHADOW

BY DOROTHY DONNELL CALHOUN

A "Different" Story

An odd, grim little story it is.

MANY a disappointed lover, in the first agonizing pangs of his disillusioning, has lingered outside his dear lady's door to gaze dolefully on the spot where centered his intense emotions. The incident is common enough, but seldom, if ever, have such events followed the gazing as those adventures that came to *Mark Renshaw*, hero of "SALLY'S JEWELS," by Mary Lerner. It is a brisk sort of a yarn Miss Lerner has given us, full of adventures and surprises. We are presenting it to the readers of the ALL-STORY WEEKLY with next week's issue. We enjoyed reading it, and we feel sure that all our friends will.

ARE burglars people?

Perhaps, patient reader, you don't think so. Perhaps the memory of some recent loss attributable to Yeggs, Petermen, Loft Ramblers, or just plain Porch Climbers rankles you and beclouds your judgment.

But now a champion of the downtrodden burglar has come forward—a man who believes that burglars have feelings, just like you and I. His contribution to burglary literature, which will appear in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY, is called "A DOTING BURGLAR," by Ben Hecht.

If you read Mr. Hecht's illuminating account of a burglar's troubles, you will never feel like addressing an unkindly word to a burglar again.

RECENTLY we published a story by Raymond S. Spears, telling how *Old Drew Nuckle*, the miser and cheat met his waterloo. It was *Sal-Bet Legere*, daughter of *Old Crumby*, who did for *Old Drew Nuckle*, and the story was called "A Skun Log Floats." Readers will hear again of *Old Drew Nuckle* in next week's ALL-STORY WEEKLY if they turn to "STUMPS OF GOOD TIMBER," by Raymond S. Spears. There is quite a lot of good in even a stump, if the tree is sound. So it was with *Old Drew Nuckle*. The story has a flavor as quaint as the characters it pictures.

DANDY SHORT STORIES

TO THE EDITOR:

I would like to know if Mr. E. R. Burroughs is going to write a sequel to "Thuvia, Maid of Mars." I would certainly appreciate it if E. R. B. will write one.

"The Lad and the Lion" was great. "Ozer Toti's Daughter" and "Gunhilda's Magic" are certainly fine stories; give us more of them. "The Rebel Soul" also was a very good story. You are certainly giving us some dandy short stories lately. Keep up the way you are running now and I won't have a single kick. I am not knocking a single story this time, for the simple reason that there has not been a bad story for weeks. Don't let Burroughs forget that last Mars story. When he writes this one, and ends it decently, we will call it quits.

With best wishes to the ALL-STORY WEEKLY, I remain,

CHARLES MCINTYRE, JR.

565 S. Fourth Street,
San Jose, California.

WRITERS AND ROLLER-SKATES

TO THE EDITOR:

I am not going to tell you what a fine magazine you are putting out, because any one that has read it can do that.

E. G. Hoffman has the right idea when he asks for more *Tarzan* stories. "The Lad and the Lion" was far too short. I would have liked to see several more chapters of it.

It seems to me that, with your staff of writers, that some one of them could give us a story with the scenes laid in a roller-rink. I have never in all my reading found such a story. The ALL-STORY WEEKLY has plenty of readers who roller-skate, and I am quite sure they would

be pleased with a story that would remind them of things that have happened to themselves.

Isabel Ostrander, to my estimation, would be the one to write such a story, for she sure did prove herself a writer of note when she produced "Between Heaven and Earth."

With hopes of having my wish granted in the near future, I wish to send my regards to all employed to make the ever popular ALL-STORY WEEKLY a success.

Yours truly,
"FREEZY."

Rochester, New York.

THE TOP OF THE LADDER

TO THE EDITOR:

I've just finished reading Edgar Franklin's wonderful surprise, "They Never Come Back." That was some story. I just can't say enough of its gifted author. It is humorous, with just a touch of pathos to make it interesting. "Lady Barnacle" was excellent also. By the way, are any of his books in book form?

Jennie Haskell Rose is a writer worthy of notice. "Ozer Toti's Daughter" was a great piece of fiction, but was surpassed by the sequel, "Gunhilda's Magic." *Gunhilda* is a woman that will allow no obstacles to stand in her way.

"The Terrible Three" was a story written in a new style, weird and fanciful. In a way I liked it, because it does not require a sequel. It's an "all's-well-that-ends-well" story.

"Marked Men" was fair.

To end with I'll say that I don't like E. K. Means, Zane Grey, or the *Semi-Dual* stories; but every one to his taste, I suppose.

All the stories and serials are A1, and I think the ALL-STORY WEEKLY has reached the top of the ladder; further improvement seems impossible.

This is rather a long letter to see in Heart to Heart Talks, but I just had to express my appreciation of your fine stories.

J. D. B.

Denver, Colorado.

NOTE: "Opportunity," by Edgar Franklin (ALL-STORY WEEKLY, January 20 to February 10, 1917), is the only one that has been published in book form. It has been brought out by W. J. Watt & Co., New York City, under the title "In and Out."

THE IDEAL

TO THE EDITOR:

In writing you this letter it is my sole purpose to express my appreciation for the ALL-STORY WEEKLY with which you are entertaining fiction readers. I have read many magazines, but, of course, my ideal is the ALL-STORY WEEKLY.

In your Heart to Heart Talks I find that there are many who can't keep from registering knocks, but it is just a case in point to prove the old assertion that human nature is never satisfied. Of course there are some few stories that I do not care for, but there are always good stories enough in each issue to make the magazine worth its price many times over.

I get all my reading matter at news-stands, as I am never in one place long enough to subscribe for anything regularly.

E. and J. Dorrance, Z. Grey, E. R. Burroughs, and, in fact, nearly all of them are fine.

T. W. HEDGER.

Ulm, Arkansas.

STRANGE FASCINATION OF *MR. SHEN*

TO THE EDITOR:

I've just finished reading "Mr. Shen of Shensi," by H. Bedford-Jones in the August 18 ALL-STORY WEEKLY. This story possesses a strange fascination. Don't you think it needs a sequel? Would like to know the fate of *Miss Alton*, also if *Mr. Shen* passed over or was inured against Ku-poison. If Mr. Bedford-Jones is authentic in his Chinese love, can't you persuade him to give us some knowledge of the magic mysteries of the Chinese concerning the human soul and the power to control it? My husband is a lawyer, and would profit greatly could he possess the power to place opposing witnesses in a position to reveal all they know. By all means have Mr. Bedford-Jones continue this story, and impart to your readers all his mysterious information.

Hoping to hear from Mr. Jones soon again,

MRS. NANCY COOMBS.

San Francisco, California.

SOME GLOOM DESTROYER

TO THE EDITOR:

Readers must have some grouch who write, "I will forgive you for the space wasted by E. K. Means," and things like that.

I have been a reader of your magazine for so many years I can't remember when I first started, and while E. K. Means is not my favorite author, still both my husband and myself always look for his stories as soon as we get the book. We both like Fred Jackson, Edgar Franklin, and Perley Poore Sheehan. In fact, we like them all, and we both enjoy a smile enough to appreciate E. K. Means. Your ALL-STORY WEEKLY could not do better, and E. K. Means is sure some gloom-destroyer. We will be glad to have you "waste" a little more space on him.

MRS. H. WOLF.

Sacramento, California.

"A PASSPORT TO THE KINGDOM OF PLEASURE"

To the Editor:

I have been a reader of *The Argosy* for years, but the more frequent appearance of the All-Story Weekly has made me switch my allegiance. Whenever I see on the contents page the name of E. K. Means, Frank Condon, or Stephen Allen Reynolds, I know I am certain of at least one story that will chase the blues away.

I am an American soldier in the Philippine Islands, and this is certainly some lonesome place, as there are no Americans here except soldiers, and there is no chance to get back to God's country until my enlistment is up, so I find the All-Story Weekly a passport to the kingdom of pleasure.

George K. Steele.

Co. M, 27th Infantry,
Camp John Hay,
Mount Province, Philippine Islands.

LETTERETTES

Being an inveterate reader, I consider that I am quite capable of making comparisons of the standard magazines. My den is ever littered with the late issues of my favorites. I have never acknowledged my appreciation of any magazine, but I wish the clever minds of all the geniuses, who collaborate to make the All-Story Weekly what it is, to know that I consider it the cleverest, cleanest magazine on the market.

I have just finished the May 19 edition—a back number, to be sure—at two A.M. "The Sequel" is one of the keenest, most thoroughly enjoyable stories I have ever read. More of Sullivan, please.

James Sanders.

3425 Michigan Avenue,
Kansas City, Missouri.

Enclosed find four dollars, for which please extend my subscription one year to the All-Story Weekly. It is sure a whale of a magazine, and I wouldn't be without it for twice the price.

Very respectfully,
J. R. Ethrington.

Mont Floweree.

Here comes another reader of your magazine. Mother has been getting the All-Story Weekly for about five years. I have not been reading it very long, as I would always prefer books; but I find that I like the stories in the All-Story Weekly best—such stories as "Fate's Honeymoon." Please give us more of Fred Jackson's stories.

I am fifteen years old, but I read all the stories that I have time to read when I am not in school.

My best wishes are for the All-Story Weekly.

Nannie Kernedy.

Bodcaw, Arkansas.

Can't tell you much about the stories lately. Have been too busy to read them; but we are both looking forward to good reading this winter. I think we will be pretty happy this winter with the All-Story Weekly, a canary, and a victrola with plenty of good records. Wish every one was as well off as we are for long, dreary days and evenings that are coming.

Wishing you all good luck, we are

Mr. and Mrs. Jesse L. Taylor.

R. R. 2, Box 85,
Michigan City, Indiana.

Have been a reader of your magazine for some time, but in all the rare good stories you have printed since I started reading your dandy book, "The Bride of Battle," in the August 25 issue, has them all cheated for being some good story. Let's have more of the O'Reilly stuff. Hurrah for the All-Story Weekly and the Irish!

The story gets to me especially as I was a machine-gun operator with Orozco at the battle of Jaurez. Also several others; served in all thirteen months of the Mexican rebellion.

C. W. Sullivan.

315 Second Street,
Peoria, Illinois.

I just wrote to you the other day, but will have to write again to tell you what I think of "Mr. Shen of Shensi," by H. Bedford-Jones. Can't you persuade him to give us a sequel? He stopped too soon. He should have told whether *Shen* lived or not, also if *Frazer* got the girl. Tell him he has to give us a sequel.

Martha Harper.

6703 Hollywood Boulevard,
Hollywood, California.

Enclosed please find one dollar to renew my subscription to the All-Story Weekly. I continue to find great pleasure in the magazine, E. K. Means being my favorite author; his stories are a scream from start to finish. I have no kicks to make. Am particularly interested in "God's Messenger," by Perley Poore Sheehan.

Yours sincerely,
Mabel Wall.

2970 West Twenty-Eighth Street,
Coney Island, New York.

She Called Herself Thief and Worse

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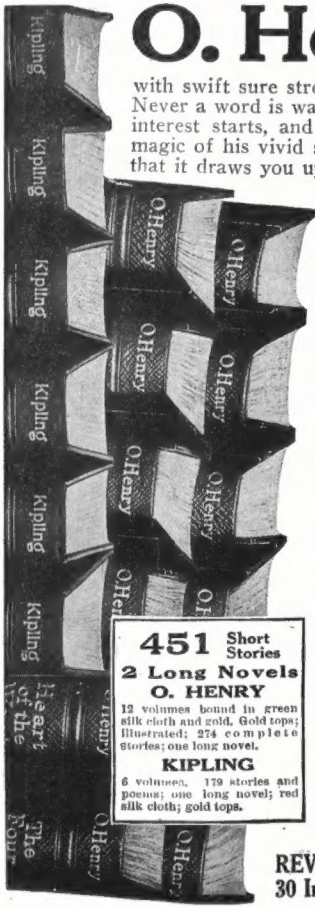

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